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ABSTRACT

Noting that the majority of teachers of boys are women, this book provides a series of case studies in which experienced women teachers talk about enjoying and using boys' energy in the classroom, tuning in to the ways that boys communicate, and varying lessons to suit all learning styles. Case studies from various schools in Australia illustrate how women and men teachers are working together to assist male students as they learn subject matter and process messages received about being a learner and being male, and about relationships with each other and with girls. Chapters 1 and 2 detail the problems that parents, teachers, and boys face with boys' achievement and behavior and suggests that the "boyswork" is an emerging practice that aims to address the academic and social needs of boys. The remainder of the book is divided into four parts. Part 1 describes teaching strategies in the practice of boyswork that have been successful in engaging boys in classroom learning. Part 2 discusses elements of successful, equitable relationships between boys and girls, and how school structures and strategies can support them. Part 3 presents case studies of programs tailored to differences between boys and girls, including programs for rural boys and Aboriginal boys. Part 4 examines childcare settings and support programs for boys at risk. The book concludes with a description of the men and boys program at the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales. (KB)

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I Can Hardly Wait Till Monday

Women teachers talk about what works for them and for boys

Deborah Hartman

I Can Hardly Wait Till Monday
women teachers talk about what works for them and for boys
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About the Author

Deborah Hartman has been an educator in primary and tertiary education for over twenty years. She has taught primary aged children in Queensland, NSW and the Northern Territory where she worked as a teacher, teacher educator and curriculum developer with Aboriginal communities. Deborah is the mother of two fine young men-in-training and has an interest in the care and education of boys both as a teacher and a parent. She joined the Men and Boys' Program of the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle in 1999. She currently offers seminars and workshops on women working with boys and is co-ordinating a postgraduate course in boys' education.

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Acknowledgements

The inspiration for this book came from the dedicated work of women teachers around Australia who are experimenting with new ways that they can teach boys well. Twelve of them and four of their male colleagues have told their stories here. The author would like to thank them all for their thoughtful contributions.

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The specific challenges of women working in boys' education are beginning to be met in schools around Australia. The Men and Boys' Program of the Family Action Centre would like to pay tribute to women teachers doing this ground-breaking work. Any errors in information or presentation of the ideas here are the full responsibility of the author.

Foreword

When parents and teachers are discussing boys' lack of motivation, their disruptive behaviours or their 'attitude', the lack of appropriate male role models is often raised as a possible cause. Most commonly, though, it will be raised as a question with some hesitation. The speaker may be male or female, but they will suggest boy's need for adult male guidance but also allow that they may be guilty of 'old fashioned' thinking. Of course it is common sense that boys learn important lessons from older males about how to be a man. It is also true that the education workforce has changed over the last decades with the result that females comprise the majority of front line workers in education. It would be a grave mistake, however, to focus exclusively on boys' needs for good relationships with older males and overlook the importance of their relationships with women. Women are important educators of boys. Boys learn a lot about themselves as learners, as problem solvers and as social beings from women teachers. Educating boys is an area for co-operation between women and men.

In the recent history of boys' education it has often been women teachers and mothers who have drawn attention to boys' needs. It is women teachers, in the main, who contact the Men and Boys Program, because they are concerned about the boys in their class, or the boys in their school. Mothers, as well as fathers call with worries about their sons' progress and future.

This book seeks to do more than recognise women's concerns about boys. Deborah's thoughtful garnering of women teacher's views of their successful strategies with boys is an important first in Australian education (and, as far as we are aware, in the world). Identifying the strengths that the women bring to their work with boys can promote a more realistic and thoughtful approach to gender in our schools. It is my hope that this book will raise the level of awareness of the crucial role women are playing in educating boys to become fine men.

Introduction

I can hardly wait till Monday is about boys - boys' achievement, boys' behaviour, boys' learning styles, boys' lives. And it's about the women who love teaching boys - women who love boys' energy, humour, their in-your-face honesty.

It's also about girls and about schools. It's about the progress schools have already made in dealing with gender issues and the areas schools are just beginning to tackle. The teachers in this book describe how they are dealing with gender issues in their schools, in ways that support both the boys and the girls. They describe how they adapted their classroom practices and school structures to teach boys to be fine young men - so that all boys can feel proud of themselves and go well in life, and so that nobody has to suffer from their unacceptable behaviours.

This is a practical book for teachers and school administrators. The case studies from experienced women teachers will assist teachers who are concerned about boys in the classroom. They show how fully engaging boys also enhances girls' learning opportunities.

There are descriptions of teaching strategies that will engage boys; classroom and school structures that encourage boys' participation; and school cultures that are inclusive of different types of boys and girls. There are great tips on how to engage boys in learning in ways that suit them.

The voices in this book also speak of what teachers and parents are saying they want for boys both academically and socially - the visions they have for fine young men in the 21st century. They describe how schools can help them get there. Parents and teachers want the best for both boys and girls. These case studies show how a positive focus on boys can help them get it for both.

Boys' lack of achievement

Boys' lack of achievement in academic and social areas is now documented in many Western countries. This book is about raising that achievement. In the introductory chapters one and two, the problems that parents, teachers and boys are facing with boys' achievements and behaviours are detailed. The practice of boyswork is suggested as an emerging practice that aims to address the academic and social needs of boys.

The book is then divided into four parts. Part One describes teaching strategies in the practice of boyswork that have been successful in engaging boys in classroom learning. It addresses learning styles, classroom practices and class structures. Experienced women teachers describe how, over their teaching careers, they have noticed ways boys like to learn and broadened their repertoire of teaching strategies to incorporate these.

Relationships between boys and girls are often difficult and unequal. The case studies in Part Two of this book discuss the elements of successful, equitable relationships and how school structures and strategies can support these. Women teachers who've been successful with boys describe how they develop appropriate teaching strategies, classrooms, and school structures that foster good relations between the boys and the girls and between the teachers and the students. They also describe how they work with men in schools. Team teaching is featured in teams with women and men working together. The merits of single sex classes for some subjects are discussed.

While boys' lack of achievement is apparent across Australia, it is important to clarify that there are differences between boys and girls and also within groups of boys and girls. The case studies in Part Three describe programs that cater for these differences. There are programs for rural boys and Aboriginal boys. Women teachers describe how they have worked with boys to foster an acceptance of difference and to expand boys' options within their perceptions of an acceptable male identity.

In Part Four, the case studies look beyond the standard classroom situation, into a childcare setting and into support programs for boys at risk. There are programs operating within the school with expertise from the community. A specialist program tackling the difficult issue of domestic violence with both boys and girls offers a model for dealing with these issues with boys in a positive, anti-violence framework.

The women and men featured in the case studies come from a diverse range of experience, geographical locations and educational settings from large urban centres, Aboriginal communities and rural regions. They teach a range of subjects from English and literacy, to cultural studies, to courses on domestic violence. They work as principals, teachers, band-leaders and guest presenters running short sessions, in primary and secondary schools.

I can hardly wait till Monday is an attempt to bring together the concerns of boys - how to be fine men, and that of women teachers - how to teach boys well. It also shows how addressing these concerns can also enhance girls' learning opportunities. The women teachers focus on practical strategies and programs that have worked for them and the boys they teach in their classrooms. They describe the relationships they have with the boys and with their male colleagues. They show how the boys have responded to their efforts with respect and admiration, and how this has enhanced learning for all the students. These initiatives will ultimately improve gender relations within schools, so that we can look forward to the day when the boys, the girls and the teachers say "I can hardly wait till Monday."

Chapter One

Why the fuss about boys?

In 1996, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was commissioned by the federal government to collect data related to literacy achievement at school. ACER's brief was to set reading and writing achievement data against benchmarks of literacy success for Year Three and Year Five. The literacy benchmarks were intended to represent minimum acceptable standards, without which a student would have difficulty making sufficient progress at school.

The resulting report, Literacy Standards in Australia (1997), found that boys as a group achieved significantly lower scores than girls as a group, in both reading and writing, at both Year Three and Year Five levels. The report showed that not all boys were failing, and that other groups of students, such as those from low socioeconomic areas, were also in trouble. However a significant characteristic, when scores across groups are matched, is that for each socioeconomic level, boys scored less well than their sisters from the same level. For those at the very bottom of the economic pyramid, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the picture is the same. Girls consistently record higher achievements in literacy than boys.

As they progress through the school system, boys do not make up the gap. At senior secondary level in Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales, figures for English show girls significantly outperforming boys. Victorian data mapping boys' and girls' achievement from Year Five to Eleven paint a dramatic picture of boys' failure. (Hill, Rowe, Holmes-Smith, Russell, 1996)

Other evidence, from the same surveys, points to boys' lower levels of enjoyment at school and their higher inattentiveness.
'Inattentiveness' is the polite term for 'driving the teacher crazy'. As anyone who has tried to get a classroom of students to focus on their

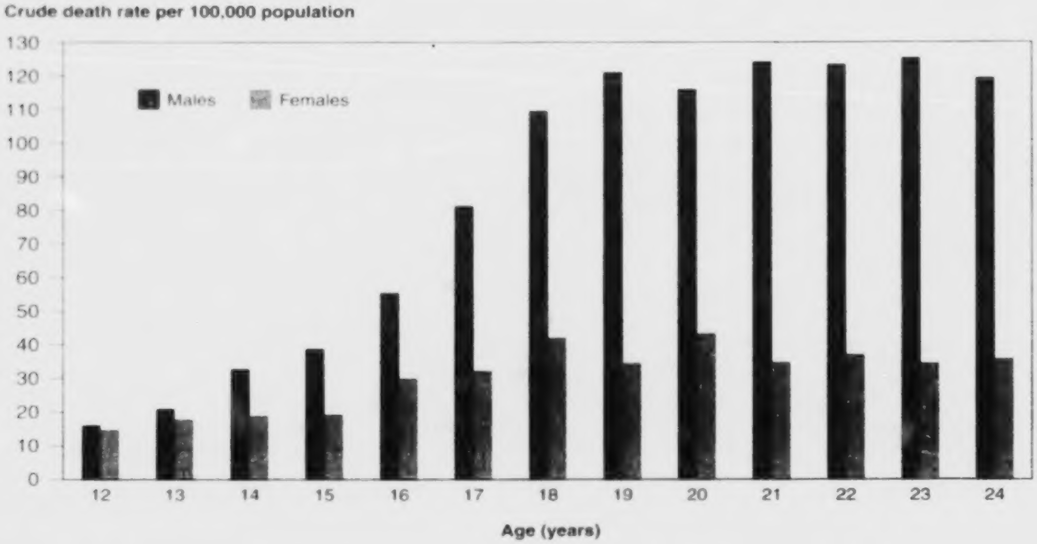
work knows, those boys fiddling with other equipment, hanging out the window or jostling others can make teaching difficult.

Over recent years, extreme impulsive, fidgeting behaviour has become identified as more than boys' normal energetic restlessness. Diagnoses of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) have grown alarmingly in our schools. The rates vary across states and regions, but one feature is constant: the disorder is overwhelmingly male.

Similarly, boys risk taking, aggressiveness and lack of concern with their safety has always been a worry. But the stark reality of young men's lives with acquired spinal or head injuries brings into question the acceptance of this as typical boyish behaviour in cars, at parties, or on the footy field.

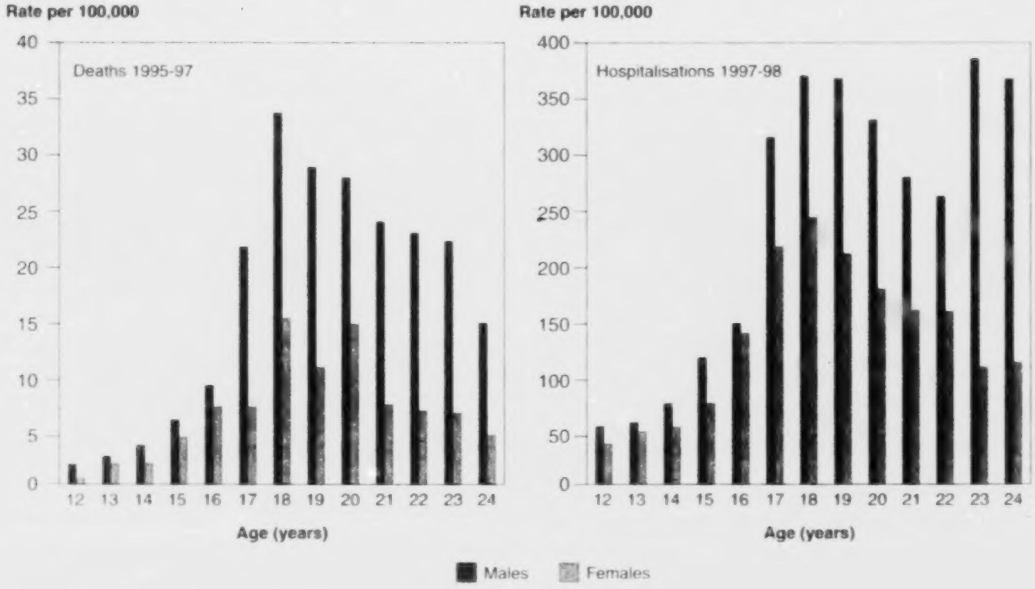
Not all concern is due to worsening outcomes. Rates of injury from work and motor vehicle accidents are declining. Even so, the rates shown in these graphs from the first report on the health of young people aged 12-24 are now recognised as unacceptable.

Youth Death Rates by Age and Sex, 1993-97



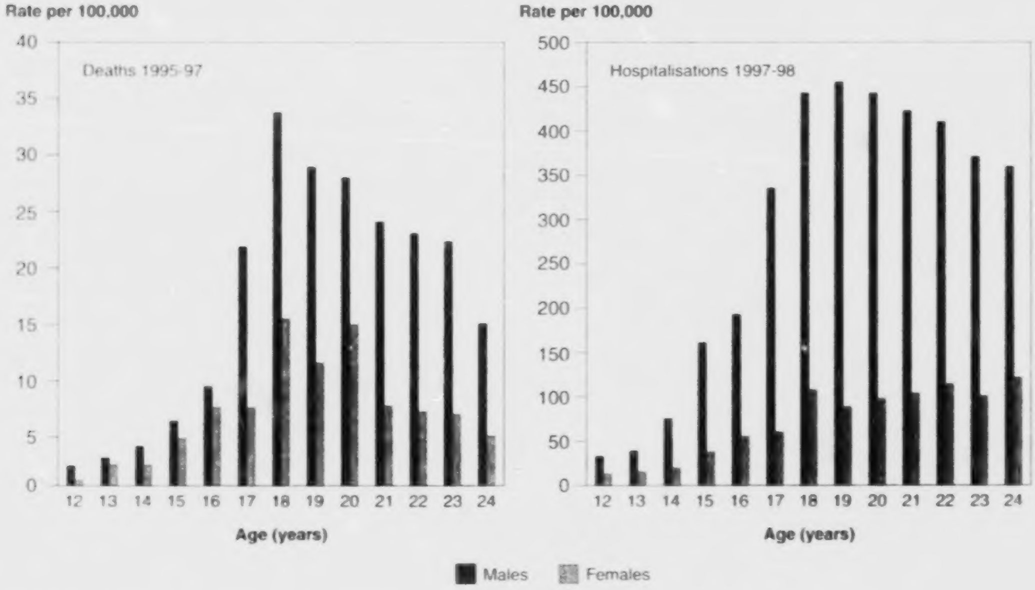
Source: AIHW Mortality Database

Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths (1995-97) and Hospitalisations (1997-98) by Age and Sex, 12-24 year olds



Source: *AIHW Mortality Database, AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database*

Deaths (1995-97) and Hospitalisations (1997-98) from Injuries Purposely Inflicted by Others, by Age and Sex, 12-24 year old



Source: *AIHW Mortality Database, AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database*

Suicide among young people affects those around them very strongly. A self-inflicted death, even more than a tragic accident, seems to force questions of 'Why?' and 'How could we have prevented this?' among those closest to the deceased. When the rates for suicide from 1964 to 1997 were compared, the rates for young men were found to have risen considerably, while those for young women have remained low. In 1997 for example there were 93 female and 417 male suicides in the 15-24 year age group.

The widening of concern for boys, from simply reading and writing, to generally poor academic achievement, and to health and social concerns, has meant that the range of those worried about boys has grown significantly. No longer is it just the teachers complaining in the staff room about individual boys' behaviour, or isolated parents worrying about their own boys' progress. Now health and welfare professionals, youth workers, community groups and parent and teacher organisations are voicing their concern about groups of boys or boys in general. The indicators from each area: school, the courts, the hospital and the morgues, give an alarming picture.

The recognition that all is not well with boys comes from new evidence, but also from new attitudes to old ways of doing things. Detention rooms full of boys are nothing new. What is new is the realisation that inattention in Year Three boys leads to poor outcomes at Year Ten, and that the social costs for the boys, the girls and the community are enormous.

It seems clear that there is a link between boys' perceptions of being male, and boys' depression and suicide rates, accidents and deaths, and under-achievement in schools.
Parents and teachers are saying 'What can we do?' We're beginning to ask ourselves, 'Why is it like this for boys?' And we're beginning to say it is not OK. Parents are saying 'We do not want our boys to kill themselves, die in accidents or end up in gaol. We do not want them to seek violent solutions to their problems. We do not want them to fail at school.' We're also saying we do not want girls to suffer from these kinds of behaviours and we do not want girls to follow boys down these same self -destructive paths.

Isn't it just hormonal?

There is a belief that these behaviours are biologically based: "Boys will be boys", or hormonally based: "It's the testosterone." There are biological and hormonal factors influencing boys' development, but these are only one influence on boys.

We are all born with certain sets of genetic pre-dispositions, but from then on it's over to our parents, our teachers, our institutions and ourselves to shape the ways we will turn out and what we choose to do with the genetic and hormonal factors we have.

While biological and hormonal factors may influence us, masculinity and femininity are largely socially constructed. This book concentrates on these social factors because these are the ones we can do something about. The concrete world of the classroom and what can be done to support boys in this situation is the focus here.

Shouldn't we just be thinking about individual children, not boys or girls?

There is a belief that if we ignore gender differences and merely treat everyone the same, then eventually the differences will disappear and we will no longer have boys and girls, men and women, but only people or individuals. There is no evidence that this is actually happening. Gender, it appears, is a crucial aspect of an individual's identity. Concepts of masculinity and femininity have not gone away. We still raise our children to be boys or girls. We still identify as men or women as adults. Gender is the first social difference we learn to recognise. From the age of two, children can predict with almost 100% accuracy, whether another person is male or female. (Olsen & DeFrain 1997)

Over the past twenty years, we have broadened our definitions of what it means to be a woman or girl. This broadening of our concepts of femininity has had many positive outcomes for women and girls and for society in general. In different ways, we now need to turn our attention to men and boys.

Why bother worrying about gender, aren't socioeconomic and cultural factors more important?

There is a complex relationship between gender, and other social factors such as socio-economic circumstances, culture, race and geographical locations. Gender factors are important in every socioeconomic, cultural, racial and geographic group. Gender issues are addressed differently in particular communities. This book focuses on boys' masculine identities. How gender identity interacts with some of these other factors in particular communities, is also discussed.

Girls' education strategies

Girls' education strategies over the last two decades have concentrated on broadening options for girls. They have been very successful in stretching girls' perceptions of femininity. The slogan 'Girls can do anything', summed up the endless possibilities that could be open to girls within a feminine identity. While much work on equity is still needed, particularly in the workforce, the attention to girls through these strategies has produced many positive outcomes for girls in schools.

Access and equity policies, anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies and programs, anti-bias curricula, innovative curricula on sexuality, sex education, and domestic violence have all enhanced girls' education options. Girls now have some expanded subject and career choices. The success of many girls in the areas of maths and science has been a radical change in achievement patterns in the last two decades. While there are still big differences between girls from different socioeconomic, racial and cultural circumstances, girls are doing increasingly well compared with boys from their own social groups.

These social and educational changes have led us, as a society to be able to answer with increasing confidence some big philosophical and ethical questions. What do we want for women and girls in their lives and relationships? What are the different ways we expect women and girls to behave and be? Although we have not yet been able to achieve the outcomes we desire, we have a fairly clear vision of what we want the gender picture to look like for women and girls. This picture has many positive images that girls can aspire to. We do not have the same kind of clarity for men and boys. Until recently, we have not paid the same attention to similar questions about men and boys.

Boyswork is not the same as work with girls

Boys' education has not developed from a broad social movement of men insisting that their lives should change. Men do not have the same justice and equity issues as women. Although comparisons with girls are informative, the boys' education issue is not that boys are doing worse than girls, but merely that boys are doing badly. Boys are not reaching their full potential academically or socially. The costs of this to the boys themselves, to girls and to society are high.

It is important to develop aspects of boys' and men's identities and relationships that might form the basis for them doing well. We need to define the positive attributes we desire in men and concentrate on how we can nurture and teach these to the boys. We need to find attributes in boys that girls can value in them. As a society, we have not worked out the big ethical question of how to help our boys become fine young men. Indeed what is a fine man? What expectations do we have of men in our society and how can we help boys live up to these expectations?

Boys' Identity

The issue of a positive masculine identity is the next big male issue we need to address as a society and as an education system. We need to do this both for our boys and our girls. Confusion over what might be acceptable, positive male identities now and in the future, has left many boys disengaged with school and vulnerable to unhealthy and dangerous practices, as they try to identify what for them might be appropriate behaviours for a male.

Parents are growing up boys and girls, and schools are charged with the education of boys and girls with little public direction on appropriate gender behaviours and identities for boys. The informed public discussion of what we, as a society, expect for and from boys and men is in its infancy. It is conducted in a climate of media hysteria and misinformation, which often fuels parents' and teachers' fears, rather than supports positive initiatives.

Inside and outside the classroom

Schools, classrooms and teachers are part of this gender discussion. Academic outcomes are linked to social ones. Gender expectations of boys in society cannot be separated from their behaviours in the classroom. Relationships between men and women in society cannot be separated from relationships with women teachers and boys in the classroom.

In forums around Australia, women teachers have raised concerns about the link between academic under-achievement and the ways that boys behave inside and outside of the classroom. They are concerned at the levels of violence amongst boys and about the seeming lack of respect that boys have towards them as teachers. Many women teachers have stated that boys' attitudes and behaviours in the classroom disrupt lessons and make learning difficult for the girls and for boys. They have noticed that boys seem to lack motivation and responsibility.

We need new approaches to deal with these issues. This book deals with a range of approaches teachers have used to engage boys in learning and to enhance both their academic and social success. These approaches form an emerging practice called boyswork.

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Chapter Two
Boyswork

Boyswork is a positive approach to boys' learning that examines all aspects of gender with boys, with the aim of encouraging and supporting them to develop into fine young men.

In this gendered world, "How do I be a fine man?" is a crucial gender question for boys. How do boys develop their sense of identity as a man? What does being a man mean in their relationships with other men and with women? What does the diversity among men mean for an individual man and for his relationships with others? These three elements of identity, relationships and difference are linked together in the lives of boys. They cannot be separated from boys' learning. Yet many schools pay little attention to these social dimensions of boys' lives, caught up as they are in the daily tasks of organising for learning.

Identity, relationships and difference are linked with learning

For both boys and girls, gender is a crucial factor in the formation of our identities. In the current situation of constant change, boys are now confronted with many conflicting ideas about being a man, and boys are struggling to develop a positive sense of themselves and their place in the world.

Gender is linked with race, culture, sexuality and social class in the formation of social and individual identities. Boys from all social groups must come to terms with an appropriate masculine identity for them, within their particular social circumstances. They must learn about the differences and the similarities between them.

Particular groups of boys are experiencing extreme difficulty. For example, young Aboriginal men are incarcerated at much higher rates than other young men. They are also more likely to be unsuccessful at school and to leave early. (Moon, Meyer & Grau, 1999). Rural boys have higher suicide rates than other boys. Young working class men who may have had certain risk-taking behaviours valued in particular industries, now find that those jobs are no longer available, and they need quite different qualities to succeed at work.

In the case studies in this book, schools and teachers have promoted an awareness and a celebration of differences among boys. The different notions of masculinity available in different cultural groups have become a rich resource for teaching and expanding all boys' notions of masculinity.

How boys perceive themselves as male is inextricably linked to how and why boys might learn, and how they behave in the classroom and school. In the emerging practice of boyswork, many school leaders and teachers are recognising that schools have a role in promoting positive identities for boys and good relationships between individual boys and girls and different groups of boys and girls. Valuing and supporting male identity in the school means being positive about boys, for example by acknowledging their learning style preferences.

While both boys and girls exhibit preferences for a wide range of learning styles, many boys show tendencies towards the physical, visual and practical styles of learning. These likely preferences have been used to expand the learning opportunities for boys and girls in the classroom. Strengths in these areas can be harnessed to create a collaborative learning environment between boys and girls. Group work can be successful, when preferences are built upon, and a variety of skills are available to each group through individual strengths.

Rethinking aspects of boys' behaviour

Traditionally, male relationships have been based on competition and the importance of winning. This often involves boys in risk-taking and competitive behaviours that can be self destructive and disruptive of others.

In the practice of boyswork, school leaders have developed school structures and activities based on cooperation, while channelling competition into useful activities. Schools and teachers have used the risk-taking behaviours of boys to expand and encourage risk-taking in academic or social areas, not just in physical areas. They encourage boys to analyse risk-taking and to be more aware about the degree of risk taking that is appropriate in any given situation. Aspects of risk-taking and competition can be springboards to extending boys' notions of what kinds of behaviours are acceptable in masculine identities today. If openly acknowledged, the dangers associated with them can also be discussed and addressed explicitly.

Boys' desire for competition has been harnessed towards achieving personal best scores or excellence in an area they find difficult. Boys can be encouraged to compete against themselves, against the best possible achievement, against an individual benchmark they have set themselves.

The key elements of school life, the teaching and learning programs, the structures that organise the school as an institution, and the behaviour and award systems, can support positive aspects of masculine identities available to boys. They can also be used to encourage boys to examine and develop their social behaviour and their social relationships.

Boys want to have good relationships with each other and with girls and women. Unfortunately, many boys' relationships are characterised by some form of violence. Male to male violence and aggression is rife in peer cultures, and many boys also experience, see or perpetrate some form of violence or harassment against girls or women. In the emotional sphere, boys have traditionally been allowed to express anger or frustration but not sadness or caring. Schools can promote a culture in their structural and individual relationships that is based on mutual respect and valuing authority.

Women teachers doing boyswork

We are all involved in constructing masculinity and femininity. Boys learn about gender from both women and men. They notice, and either take on or reject, notions of gender from the attitudes, actions and words of both the women and men around them. If the male deputy principal is called to the classroom every time there is a difficult problem, the boys get the message that only men have power. If it's only women teachers who take English or social science or only men who take physics, they begin to get the picture that some subjects are not for boys. If every time a boy does something unacceptable in the classroom, the teachers says, 'That boy come and see me', boys learn that merely being a boy is considered bad. If the school activities and content hardly ever involve topics that interest them or learning styles that suit them, boys may find the classroom culture very boring, and decide that school is not for them.

Until recently, there has been little thought given to the role of women teachers in boys' education. While it is important to encourage men who can relate well to boys, to enter and remain in teaching, the reality is that most of the teachers that boys will encounter will be women. In NSW, there are more women teachers than men in both primary and secondary schools, especially in face to face teaching. (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1998,1999). This trend is continuing and projections of the number of men entering pre-service teacher training indicate that there will be even fewer males in primary and secondary schools in the future, as the ones that are there now retire. Many primary school students will never have a male teacher.

Identity

Women teachers can contribute to the self-esteem of boys by giving them a strong sense that masculine identity is positively valued in the school.

All of the women teachers who contributed to this book said "I like boys." These women teachers said they valued the boys' energy, their humour, their 'in your face' attitudes. With a single voice, these women commented that positive personal relationships with the boys were crucial and that the boys could tell immediately 'if you liked them or not'.

A large group of women principals attending the Leadership in Boys' Education Conference in Newcastle in 1999, identified some critical elements for women in promoting a positive climate for boys. They highlighted the importance of their own personal attitudes and values. They said, as women, we must examine our own attitudes to gender, and be optimistic and empathetic towards boys. They would not put up with unacceptable behaviour, but said that it was important not to judge or label a boy as being a 'bad boy', because of his behaviour at a particular time.

Women working with men

Many women leaders expend great effort to find men, who are able to work with them in promoting positive identities for the boys. The women in this book sought out a diverse range of fathers, male volunteers, and male colleagues who embodied the positive male values they wanted the boys to develop in their particular context. Janet Markey and Helene Boyer both illustrate how women leaders can engage with men in the task of developing a male-positive environment.

Cheryl Hallinan and Helene Boyer suggest that there is a role for women principals to engage fathers in the education of their sons. They set up school procedures that took into account the roles that men in rural communities have. They also suggest that this could lead to more safety for rural boys to expand the notions of masculinity currently available for them in rural Australia.

Women valuing boys' learning preferences

Anne-Marie Furney and Susan Boyleen and Tony Moore show how varying teaching strategies to accommodate boys' likely preferences in learning styles send strong messages to both the boys and the girls. Being aware of and capitalising on the likely preferences of boys extends both the boys and the girls, and engages boys who are likely to be disruptive in other circumstances. Both these case studies suggest that single sex classes can be appropriate in some circumstances and for some subjects.

Relationships

Boys are very interested in what women and girls think. Boys want to know how to behave appropriately to women and girls. Women teachers can hold out to boys women's high expectations that the boys can and will behave appropriately. Helene Boyer describes working collaboratively with a male colleague to give boys both a male and female perspective on a sexual harassment issue.

Boys also want to know what it's like for women and girls. Only women and girls can tell them this. Suzanne Eastwood, in her case study on domestic violence education, discusses how eager boys are to ask questions of a woman teacher, to find out what the girls really think about sex. Women can provide information, both personal and historical, on sexism and structural impediments to women in the workforce and in life.

In the practice of boyswork, women can provide models of women in leadership, in authority positions, and in relationships with men that are characterised by equality and respect by both. Beverley Theobold discusses how a woman leader can develop an institutional culture that is totally intolerant of violence or bullying by either staff or students, and embodies cooperation and collaboration between men and women rather than inequality.

Susan Boyleen and Tony Moore in Perth, Janet Markey and Barry McCartney in Brisbane, Jenni and Greg Griffith in western NSW and Suzanne Eastwood and Michael Flood in Canberra, all work in teams of women and men. They illustrate how powerful these teams can be as role models for the boys and girls, of equitable, playful and respectful relationships between men and women.

Difference

Helene Boyer, Jenni and Greg Griffith, and Mardi Droll illustrate the importance of developing specific programs for boys to meet their needs within a cultural, socioeconomic and environmental context. Women doing boyswork have developed particular relationships and ways of working in their own community.

Jenni and Greg Griffith illustrate how women and men can cooperate together to develop and run a program for Aboriginal boys, in their particular gendered context. Cheryl Hallinan highlights the differing needs of rural boys. She developed ways of engaging rural fathers in their boys' learning, that fitted in with the work circumstances of the fathers.

Suzanne Eastwood and Michael Flood stress the importance of inclusivity in any program designed for boys. There are many different ways of being masculine, and women teachers should tackle issues such as homophobia, and other behaviours which silence boys with different experiences and points of view to a dominant group in the classroom.

They can value and use as a teaching resource the different notions of masculinity available in the different cultural groups in their school or in materials available.

At a very young age, boys develop rigid ideas of acceptable male behaviours. Girls tend to have more flexible ideas of a range of acceptable female behaviours. Broadening boys' perceptions of masculinity by expanding boys' options and choices in behaviours, lifestyles and subject and careers, is an important task of boyswork.

Anne-Marie Furney and Suzanne Boylen and Tony Moore show how classroom practices that encourage and support different learning styles can help children to celebrate differences and cooperate together.

Lesley Fitzgibbon describes how the boys at her school expanded their notion of acceptable male activities to include being in the school band because of the good relationships they had with her as a teacher, and the ways she made being in the band fun for them.

Boyswork complementing work with girls

Boyswork and work with girls complement each other. Ultimately, one cannot succeed without the other. There are identity questions for each gender, and also relationship issues between genders. The case studies featured here highlight the benefits that a positive focus on boys can have for individual boys, for the different groups of boys, and for girls as well. Susan Boyleen and Tony Moore show how both the girls' and boys' literacy has improved by adopting strategies to encourage boys' literacy. They discuss how the relationships between the boys and the girls have improved by acknowledging the strengths they each bring to the learning situation.

These case studies highlight the crucial role that women can play in ensuring that boys are well catered for in school structures, programs and strategies. They exemplify women teachers working with boys and men in many different situations, to support the boys to become fine young men. They illustrate the important roles women teachers have in expanding boys' notions of identity, relationships and difference. They describe how this approach to boyswork also enhances the learning and social opportunities for girls. They are fine examples of women doing boyswork.

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Part One

Having fun with boys in the classroom – to show boys we love ‘em and to help them learn

This section is about practical classroom strategies to engage boys in learning. In the emerging practice of boyswork, teachers are taking a close look at the classroom strategies they employ, to ensure they use a variety of approaches that will suit the boys.

What does suit boys?

Recent writings in education have drawn attention to different learning styles used by different groups of students. As we learn more about how students process information, organise their knowledge and recall information to make sense of the world, our teaching methods have become more finely tuned. In any classroom, there will be visual learners, auditory learners, those who like to be active, those who prefer to go from the general to the particular and those who would rather start with the details and build up. While there are differences to be noted between boys and girls, there are also differences among boys and among girls, and there are also many similarities. To engage all boys in classroom learning, we need to use a variety of approaches including active and visual learning.

As teachers, we tend to repeat the teaching strategies that work for us. Anne-Marie Furney suggests that girls show tendencies towards talking as a way of learning, and for following a task through from beginning to end, even if they are unaware of the purpose of it. These learning styles may be shared by many women teachers, and may not suit all learners in the classroom, particularly the boys.

Anne-Marie Furney noted that the boys in her classroom displayed a preference for physical activities, and for visual learning styles. She describes how she developed a bank of learning activities to suit the boys in her class who did not respond well to her previous methods. These strategies were based on observation and trial and error. For example, she noticed that boys often disrupted the learning environment when they had to learn in ways that did not suit them for long periods of time, and when they did not understand the purpose of what they were being asked to do.

Anne-Marie used a variety of strategies to suit these boys, such as active games for those who like physical learning; laminated scribble boards to get down ideas without having to be neat; and issues boards to allow for opinions to be expressed without disruption to the flow of the lesson.

Boys are often keen to know the purpose of activities and what they are expected to do. Anne-Marie suggests that these boys can feel more in control of their own learning, and therefore more willing to participate in classroom activities, if teachers carefully outline the learning sequences and expected outcomes of the lessons and units of work at the beginning. Students can also be involved in choosing topics for study. This kind of classroom democracy has helped to minimise disruptions and engage both the boys and the girls in classroom learning.

Many boys also show enthusiasm for competition and risk-taking. Teachers engaged in boyswork are beginning to see how some positive aspects of these behaviours can be channelled into productive learning, enabling boys to feel validated and valued in the classroom. Anne-Marie describes how she channelled competition into increased individual and group achievement. By having the boys compete against their own previous results, cooperate in a team through time trials, physical games, and team spelling games, she improved the academic and interpersonal standards in the classroom.

Having good relationships with boys can also encourage them to extend themselves into new learning areas. Lesley Fitzgibbon describes how she encouraged boys at her school to join the school band, through valuing their sense of humour, having fun with them and treating them with respect in the band and in the classroom. She suggests that setting clear expectations and listening to boys in particular ways will help them to feel safe to express themselves. She found that humour and regular success are important tools for keeping boys engaged in classroom and extra-curricular activities.

In schools, social relations are conducted through the daily learning activities. When boys are learning, they are also developing their social identities as boys. Boys often get messages, from peers and even from teachers that, to a certain extent, "it's cool to be a fool" and "boys are baddies". Boys do not separate learning to be men from their daily school activities. They take these messages into their perceptions of themselves and then apply these to the classroom activities.

If we want boys to be successful at learning, we need to support them to develop positive male identities, which include being successful learners. We want them to see themselves as successful at school and in a broad range of school activities.

By being aware of differences, and specifically planning for a variety of learning styles, women teachers can make special efforts to cater for learning and communication styles that may differ from their own preferences. Women teachers have an important role in supporting boys to broaden their sense of masculine identities and to accept differences amongst themselves.

Both case studies show the importance of teachers modeling respectful relationships with boys. Using first names, quiet tones, speaking individually and avoiding public shaming or ridicule are important ways that teachers can show respect for boys.

Mutually respectful relationships is a theme we return to in each part of this book. Women teachers can help develop these kinds of relationships by communicating with boys in clear and authoritative, yet light-hearted ways, to encourage the same kind of respect in the boys.

The practical classroom strategies suggested in the following case studies involve boys in learning. They also involve boys in learning to be fine young men, succeeding at school and relating to teachers, other boys and girls in enjoyable and respectful ways.

Case Study One

Anne Marie Furney

Anne Marie Furney is currently Deputy Principal at Dubbo South High School. She has many years experience as a classroom teacher of English and in leadership roles in rural high schools in NSW.

While the research does indicate that boys have a preference for physical activities and active ways over just the direct verbal delivery, all boys are different and there is a full range of learning styles and preferences in the boys, the same as there is in the girls. However, having said that, it has been apparent to me over my career that there are things boys prefer to do rather than the girls. Those things tend to revolve around activities they see as having a bit of a competitive edge or activities which allow them to do the things which they feel that they do well.

Knowing the purpose of the lesson

Boys need a purpose. If you go into a classroom with girls regularly, you can just give the work out, put the work up on the board, and without question many girls will just do it. Because they know, you come to school, the teacher gives you work, you do work. For boys they need some sort of explanation. Why am I doing this? What relevance does this have to my life?

I find that it's very important with boys in particular, to really explain the sequence of activities that they're going to be involved in, the purpose of them, why they're doing them and how they're going to be assessed on part of it. Girls will accept that they get tests, and won't necessarily question why they're having the test, or even indeed how the test will be marked. Whereas the boys want to know, how are you judging me on this? What are the components you're looking for? What competencies do I have to demonstrate? And, for boys in particular, you have to link that assessment back to the original planning with the kids about what the purpose of the whole thing was in the first place.

Varying the activities

I don't give lessons that are one hour of copying from the board or from the overhead or listening to me talk. There might be ten minutes of teacher exposition, followed by fifteen minutes of group consultation, and that might be followed by a learning game.

'We're going to do this for fifteen minutes. I know you're going to find it a bit of a hard slog but at the end of that time we're going to play a game.'

For some boys if you could say, 'We're going to do this for fifteen minutes, I know you're going to find it a bit of a hard slog but at the end of that time we're going to play a game', then they'll say 'Oh, I could do that'. Because they know that this time is coming. They become very time orientated though. They'll often say 'Your fifteen minutes is up Miss! You've been talking for too long!' But that's not such a bad thing either because it helps to keep you focused on the purpose of the activity.

I find that if you can convert things to games, that's often a really great tool with boys. I try to have a range of different group-based activities, particularly if I'm teaching Year 7 and eight and sometimes nine. In any one lesson there might be six different activities that they rotate through. So that everyone knows that there'll be four I'll really like, one I can live with and one I'll probably hate. But at least I don't have to spend more than a set amount of time on it. And I think that addresses everybody's needs in a mixed sex class. It's all closely aligned with chunking your lesson time down, breaking up activities and so on. And I think if you can do that with a good, sound understanding of learning styles, then you're catching everybody, including the boys who do have a bit of a preference for some learning styles.

Using competition

They love to be involved in competitive sorts of things. I use this in the classroom. For individual activities, I link those to a bit of competition with yourself. In a lot of vocabulary building and spelling, they'll do time trials against themselves and graph their results, so they can see their improvement.

In spelling, they'll do time trials against themselves and graph their results so they can see their improvement.

Scribble Boards

Boys are quite often not particularly neat with books. It's a real problem for them, particularly in junior school where girls seem to be rewarded for pretty work, nice margins and headings and lots of colouring-in, which the boys don't value. So they often feel a bit miffed about that. One thing that I noticed repeatedly, particularly with boys who are actually striving to do very well in the class, is that they spend an awful lot of time ripping pages out of their book. They'd see that it wasn't as neat as the girl's sitting beside them, so they'd rip out and start again. So after a fifty minute period you'd say 'Okay Greg, what have you achieved today?' and he'd say 'I'm just up to here'.

I introduced scribble boards in my room a while ago. I purchased some A3 size fluoro cardboard in about six colours and laminated them. When we're doing brain storming to get your ideas down, just jotting down points, the kids work with whiteboard pens on these scribble boards. It just wipes off because it comes off exactly like a whiteboard. And then you don't have that ripping your book, scratching through about eight pages with the pressure of the rubber, the way they do. And they don't actually go to their book work until they're satisfied with what they've got on the scribble board. So all the self- correcting and the discussion and the arguing happens outside of their workbook. It's hugely simple, and it's a great tool.

Forming groups

Often boys will argue about whose group they go into. The scribble boards can help with this too. If you just hand out coloured pieces of laminated cardboard and say all the people who have got orange go here, all the people that have got yellow go here, they don't make that connection, 'You're making me work with Sally who I hate'. It's just like 'Oh, I've got yellow cardboard today, I've got to work with Sally'. It's a really nice little tool to break down the boys against the girls attitudes.

Keno Spelling

I taught for years in a school that worked very, very hard to develop literacy amongst all of it's students, but particularly it had boys that were performing way under levels we'd have liked them [illegible] perform.

We developed a game we called Keno Spelling, using felt notice-boards. We made up alphabet sets that are placed in rows with little bits of Velcro on the back. We had a whole range of games, where the kids would race out and grab the Velcro letters and spell words and terms and even make sentences with them, in teams. It's so active and it's really, really good fun. I've worked with a Science teacher who used them extensively to help the kids learn all of the process words in Science. You can turn it into a thousand and one things.

It gets them out of their seats in a controlled way that the teacher is in charge of. You can have charts around the room recording which team is winning. This does appeal to the boys. Particularly in their early years of high school they find that quite enjoyable.

Issues Board

I've laminated a piece of white cardboard with the word 'Issues' at the top. And the kids are trained up right from the very beginning of my classes to use it. When they've got a problem with something that's going on, a question or an issue about something in the unit of work, or in the classroom generally, they can get up and write on this little whiteboard. I visit that twice during every lesson. At about the midpoint and just about five minutes before the end we discuss any issues that have come up. So that everyone knows, if they have a question or issue it'll get answered, addressed or discussed. I've found that a really powerful tool.

The boys seem to need more training in it. When I first started, boys used to write quite cryptic things on it. I've found the girls will put their hand up and quietly tell you things, or sometimes not so quietly, but the boys won't really do that. They'll talk amongst themselves and that's what leads to the disruption in the room. It becomes this whispering, 'I don't like that' and when I say 'What's going on?' 'Oh nothing Miss'. They won't actually articulate it. So just by putting that cardboard off to the side, not saying anything to the kid who gets up and writes on it, until that time in the lesson has arrived, it seems to address that difficulty they have sometimes in coming straight out with what's required.

Clear Learning Goals and Expectations

I try to vary the organisation of my room quite often and I always involve the kids in the decisions about the unit of work at the beginning point. So up front I'm very open with them about the outcomes that I want to be achieved as part of the unit of work and I actually give them a very lineal list of what will be covered in weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4. Most of my units went for four to five weeks and I would tell them, 'Week 1 we'll be doing this, week 2 we'll be doing that'.

It goes right down to saying, 'In week 3 all the activities are focused around a group work assignment. So in that week we'll re-organise the classroom for group work'. I prefer to set up the classroom for group work only when it's appropriate, rather than having it constantly in groups, where they're inclined to talk and be distracted by each other.

During the beginning part, where there might be a bit of teacher exposition, and a lot of directed learning, I have the room in a fairly traditional mode so that I can get the attention focused up onto me. But I find by being really open about what you're going to be doing, and why you're going to be doing it right down to the room organisation, it seems to address that need of the boys to know what's going on.

Single Sex English Classes

We've been doing some experimenting here at Dubbo South High School in the English Department, with some single sex classes in senior English. They're going very well. The boys are actually feeling much more directed in their learning and much more purposeful. The two classes that are currently operating are both taught by male teachers to try and provide that male role model as well. It's an idea that was generated out of the whole of the faculty and the head teacher has taken it on board. He actually has a boys' class in both Year 11 and Year 12, and reports much better outcomes, much better focusing. He's able to tailor the choices that he makes from the syllabus documents, to select things which he thinks will be more appropriate for the boys. Whereas in a mixed class, often you'll find yourself studying Jane Austen, for example, which many girls really come to love in their senior years, but many boys always have a difficulty with. The boys say 'What is this about and why does that woman think so much!' So when you're in a situation where you can choose topics like peace and war and conflict in the world, and you can do documentary dramas, like Scales of Justice, and so on, you really do align yourself a little better with the interest of young men. I think there is a real case for, depending on your circumstances, looking at the possibility of single sex classes in senior English.

The girls report less disruption in the classes, which they really like, and they also report less conflict, in that they don't have to explain why they like Jane Austen, they can just get on with learning about it. And so all round it has some benefits. It's not necessary in all subjects, but it seems in English where the boys are having difficulty, there is a case for single sex classes. If you look at the results across the state, we're seeing trends there, which indicate that the boys are finding English more difficult. In NSW it was recently decided to change the requirements for English in the High School Certificate, so we really need to maximise the opportunities for boys, and perhaps this is one way we can do that.

Structure of the Timetable

The relationship has to be based on being open and honest but not forcing them to emote.

We run longer periods in the morning and shorter periods in the afternoon. This is to take into account that by the time the boys have had a really good run round and played a bit of football at lunchtime, they're less inclined to want to sit for 60 to 75 minutes for that last period of the day. So after lunch we just have two short 40 minute periods. Whereas we start the day with periods that are a bit over an hour.

This school also has a four-week cyclic timetable they rotate through. To make things even across the key learning areas, each subject gets some of that really prime learning time in the mornings. This has also allowed the school to organise the timetable in such a way that we can have Friday mornings free for the senior students to attend vocational education and training opportunities at TAFE. We have about sixty kids here in Year 11 alone undertaking Joint Secondary Schools TAFE or Vocational Education. That structured timetable does give us a lot of flexibility.

Broadening the Curriculum

The other thing we've tried to do in our general organisation, is to promote things like part-time traineeships, and to increase the number of vocationally trained teachers we have on staff, so the school can broaden the curriculum to meet the needs of all students. It's not just boys but it does tend to meet the needs of a lot of boys, particularly now that more people are staying on at schools through to Years 11 and 12. For boys that are interested in building and construction and information technology and automotive studies and those sorts of things, there's actually an opportunity to do some of that. We've got two boys in the school involved as part-time trainees in the metal industry. They've got three days a week here at the school, some time at the TAFE, and a day at work. I think both boys would say that's been one of the things that's kept them at school and kept them very focused.

Building Relationships with Boys

It's probably true with all students, but I find particularly with boys, you have to establish a relationship with them. And that relationship has to be based on being open and honest but not forcing them to emote. In my subject area, in particular, where there is a lot of literary, media and film study, we often expect the boys, like the girls, to express lots of emotive opinions about the character's motivations and so on. And boys don't particularly like emoting in public and telling all about how they feel. Relationships which start off on the basis of talking about 'Great Expectations', and 'We're all going to talk about why Pip does what he does', don't exactly turn them on.

It's really important up front to establish a relationship with them, that's about clear expectations and firmness. It's my experience that boys' behaviour is governed a little bit by the person out the front. If they know they can get away with things, they will, they'll try to do that. Boys will say things to you like 'I won't work for a twit'. So regardless of how interesting the content might be, if they don't respect you and they don't feel valued in your room they won't do anything for you. I think working on that relationship stuff right at the beginning is very important.

Teaching group work and communication skills

One of the first things you need to do, in the very first unit of work, is to teach them the skills of establishing what it is that they want to do and communicating it. I've tried to make the first unit a lot about general group work skills and also getting them to select issues that they're interested in and turn those into a unit of work.

You have lots of basic democracy, about having a list of issues, narrowing those down to the top five then voting. They get some sense that they're helping to run this. It seems to be a really important factor for boys. I think that if you do those basic things right at the beginning, it's like making deposits in people's emotional bank account. Later on they'll trust you to lead them through the things that they know they'll never like but they have to do anyway. But you've got to establish the trust up front.

Teachers do an awful lot of talking, but sometimes they're not really great at listening. My experience is, you have to listen very carefully to boys, because they're not as articulate as many girls are, and less inclined to talk about how they feel about things. You can miss the point, but somewhere it will be there. You just have to listen really carefully. So that means making time for them to talk.

Recognising differences

As a female teacher sometimes you get very frustrated about how they talk, because you want it to happen much faster. I think, 'Oh God, just tell me what you want, hurry up!' But you can't and that's a great thing to learn to balance in teaching. I've found these ways of working personally very rewarding and very successful but they haven't been without difficulty.

A lot of the difficulty has been about me personally coming to understand what the boys really needed, and not putting my prejudices or my system of thinking onto theirs. In teaching it's really easy to do that, to think that I'm the educated person here, I'm the leader of this learning, this is what we do. We need to be more response driven. We need to really look at our clients' needs. Sometimes that's not easy, because I could see that my way of thinking is often very different to theirs. The classic example I always share with the kids is my husband is an engineer, and if we go anywhere that we've not been before, he's often driving and I have the map. I have to have the map pointing the way that we're driving. I just have to, so I'm always turning it. Now he can read a map up side down, back to front, sideways but he likes it to be just upright so he can just look across from the driver's seat and see. And when it's turned upside down he freaks. I often share that with the kids and the boys go 'Yeah, I hate that when girls do that!'

It's a two way street, I suppose is what I'm saying. The boys need to understand that perhaps sometimes I'll think differently to them and that they need to communicate their need and I need to listen to that need. And likewise I have to know that they think a little bit differently to me with some problems. Particularly I find it in spacial concepts, so where I need some of those things done in my room I just say to the boys 'Look could you just organise to make this happen?' I capitalise on their skills.

Expanding options

While it's absolutely true we should capitalise on peoples' strengths in learning styles, it doesn't mean we should allow other parts of their development just to flounder. Just because someone is a visual learner, it doesn't mean that they shouldn't hone their other skills. That's what schools should be about, building your strengths in every quadrant not just leaving one to chance. It's important for the boys to know that much of the work they go into as adults requires very high visual spacial skills and very good listening skills, so they need to develop all these areas.

Respect in the classroom

I hope in my room they're learning a lot about respect. What I try to do is model that in the way that I speak to both boys and girls. I try really hard to correct without harping when they do or say things that are inappropriate. Girls are often dismissive of boys sharing their thoughts, particularly in group work, because they are not quite as articulate as the girls are. So you really have to work on that with the girls too, to listen to what the boys are saying and make sure their ideas are included.

Modeling respect is about addressing people in appropriate tones of voice, using their name, making them feel valued. In giving prizes or reward systems in your room, you have to make sure that there's a good gender balance. If you run a system of work of the week or whatever, you've got to make sure that you reward all types of work, not just someone whose spent 42 hours over the weekend colouring-in every margin. You really have to look at the total, so that they do learn that everyone is different. That is as true with multicultural education and Aboriginal education. It's all part of that notion of valuing difference.

Boys will tell you the key thing, after a period when they've been very frustrating.

Women developing good teaching skills with boys

The sorts of skills I've been talking about are developed over a decade or more. So I think maybe in the first instance, it does take a little bit more time, because your skill level is not where it should be or where it's going to end up. I think I've become better at it and now I don't know that it takes anymore time. It's like learning to play the piano. You have to practice really, really hard at the beginning on your scales. Or like learning to ride a bike. For the first few miles you wobble but then when you get the hang of it you're pretty right. So it's a developmental skill.

Good relationships foster responsible learning

But I do say that quite quickly you can get over boys wasting time, acting out. Because once you get this right that really ceases to be much of a problem. There are low levels of responsibility time. I wouldn't recommend beginning this whole process in the week before the Christmas holidays, but there are times when you work on this really hard and then you get the fruits of it. Once you've got it right, you can just say 'Gerrard stop it'. And that's enough because Gerrard knows that you don't mess it up, it's not appropriate. So that's why it's worth doing. Although I really understand that sometimes Gerrard is just so frustrating you'd just rather boot him out. But then you get in that cycle of 'Get out Gerrard, get out Gerrard', and poor old Gerrard spends all his life finding the Deputy and not much learning. You have to work at it at the beginning and you have to persist.

The other thing that I had to learn, was that often boys would tell you the key thing after a period where they've been very frustrating. I can remember very vividly a situation with a young man who I taught to the Higher School Certificate a few years back and who is now a very, very successful businessman in Sydney with several degrees. And I remember him just being such a difficult kid. He was always trying to be the centre of attention and the class clown. And I vividly remember this day after he had given me a really tough time for 75 minutes, the recess bell went and I just said 'Just get out!' And he said 'Oh, I'd really like to talk to you'. And I said 'Well, why would I want to talk to you'? He said 'Oh, forget it'. And I went to the stairs and called him back. At that point he told me a very personal thing which, when I listened, was the key reason why he was acting the way he was. After I'd listened, he said 'Oh, thanks Miss'. And then everything changed almost overnight. But if I'd really done what emotionally I wanted to do, which was say 'Get out of my sight, never knock on my door and from now on I'm going to boot you to the Deputy Principal every time you do this', we would never have fixed it.

To this day this boy, a man now, sends me Christmas cards and gives me a ring every now and again. And it's all down to that one moment. Sometimes it's really hard. Teachers are busy people and some of them deal with two hundred kids a day. I take the attitude 'I cannot teach a kid whom I do not know well'. If you want to be in that mentor role you need to know kids. You need to know what makes them tick and how they think.

When you're a 14 year old boy, that constant 'Get Out' response is a smack in the face, and they can't really work out why. I can see sometimes in their faces, 'I'm really asking you to help'. It's very hard sometimes to get to listen because you see all those other pressures. You've got deadlines and you've got School Certificates and High School Certificates and other kids that need to learn and all of that stuff, but it's finding a balance in the same way that everyone has to find a balance in their own life.

Case Study Two

Lesley Fitzgibbon

Lesley Fitzgibbon has been a primary school teacher for over twenty years. She currently works at Tighes Hill Primary School, Newcastle, NSW, where she teaches a Year 3,4, and 5 class of academically gifted children. She is also the director of the school band.

I guess I get on with boys because I have brothers. I was the only girl with brothers and learnt to get on with boys. I was the boss of my brothers when I was growing up because I was the eldest in the family. We used to always play together. I also had very close girlfriends living next door to me and across the road. We always say we were very fortunate and we're still friends. One of my friends also had brothers and we all used to play together. We'd play cowboys and Indians in the days of cowboys and Indians. But we always mixed as a whole group. Mostly the boys were younger than us. Now I have two boys of my own.

Boys seem to enjoy banter, a bit of a joke.

Enjoying boys' humour

I still seem to get on well with boys and enjoy teaching them. It's because we have a bit of fun. I like to have fun in class. Maybe they have a different sense of humour from girls but they seem to enjoy banter, a bit of a joke. That's how I come to relate to them better.

Encouraging the boys in the band

We have a bit of fun in the band with the boys. Maybe that's why they're coming into the band. Some bands have very few but we've always had a good lot of boys. Fifty per cent and more of our band are boys. Some sections, like trumpet, have seven boys and two girls. I give them encouragement. I'll go up to them and have a little talk with them, a little word on the side or a joke.

I try to choose music they can move to.

If they know that you're on their side and encouraging them, then they'll do just about anything that you want. As far as their playing goes in the band, they'll just practice that bit harder or try that bit harder in the rehearsals.

Using movement

Each year in the band, you're losing kids at the end of Year 6 and you're starting beginners. It's hard to go to more difficult music that will challenge some of those who have been there for a time. But I try and choose music that they can do things to and that they can move to. Especially the boys like to do this. There's a thing they say about percussionists, that they're a breed apart, that they're a bit lunatic. There's always a lot of boys in percussion.

I try and give a variety of music. I do crowd pleasing music that parents will like to listen to and that the kids will like to perform. I try and pick music that they can stand up and move their instruments to at various times and make a performance out of it. One that we're doing now is 'The Ghost' and someone, we usually choose a boy, has to dress up, put the ghost thing on and then frighten the band and everyone screams at the end of the piece. It makes the music a bit more fun for them. They all enjoy that, the boys and the girls.

Bands can be very mundane and boring, and they've got to practice a lot. So they've got to have a bit of fun, especially the very beginners. I've got some very beginning boys in the trumpet section. I've got five. At one part in the piece where the trumpets do a couple of loud blasts, we taught them those notes, so at least they're playing something. They've got to be able to participate otherwise it's boring and that's when they don't want to be in it any more.

Actually it's funny that the boys in my class that hadn't wanted to be in a band are now in it. I guess once they get to know me, and I'm the bandleader, it was easier for them then to go into the band.

Boys in the gifted and talented class

I work with a class of gifted and talented children across Year 3, 4 and 5. They work well. In the class, I have a lot of girls in Year 3 and not many boys, but in Year 5, I have mostly boys and in Year 4 it's about equal numbers. I think boys react differently at different ages. In Year 5, they are quicker to pick up what you're saying or quicker to pick up a joke or an aside that you give. It makes them feel a bit special. They come back to me with a comment or something, and then you have closeness with them.

You couldn't ever embarrass boys in class because you just loose them completely then.

I do a lot of work, especially with three grades, where I set work at the beginning of the week and they bring it to me constantly to be marked. But they're on their own a lot. They have to do that, work on their own. So far this year there's been no problem. They're working. A lot of people say girls will work better than boys, but I can't see any difference really. I feel that the boys are working as hard.

Positive Behaviour Management and Respect

There are big changes for boys when they get into Year 6. They really start pushing the boundaries. When they start to question authority you need to treat them with a bit of care. If you can talk to them individually, they feel that they're still important. I think it's important that you care, and that they know someone cares about them. Then, you just need to give them a glance in class and they'll get the message. You don't need to make a big deal, just a look or a tap on the shoulder. They know that whatever they are doing is wrong.

You couldn't ever embarrass boys in class or call them out because you just lose them completely then. I think you've just got to keep things on a positive footing. If you contact them, single them out, talk to them, have a joke with them, they know when the time is finished, that the joke or that's over.

I think you respect their feelings in the way that you approach them at a difficult time. You need to be calm and give them time alone and talk quietly to them to talk out any problem. I think you get a lot further with that, than handing it to someone else to deal with. I have done that when things get too bad or unsafe. But I think that you can approach things calmly. I guess if you treat them that way, then they will respect you. This comes with experience too. The older you get the calmer you become and the less likely you are to go for the throat. You don't get anywhere with kids by losing your temper or making fools of them. A lot of people don't have time to listen. You've got to spare the time to listen, find out exactly how they're feeling and why they're feeling that way.

I think that in a situation where a boy is being aggressive or out of control they firstly have to be removed from the situation and then given time to calm down and that's when you can get something out

Let them cool off and then you can talk to them.

of them. Let them cool off and then you can talk to them. And more often then not you'll get a reasonable answer to what happened and reasonable results in remedying that sort of behaviour and how they should have behaved.

Long term relationships

One reason that I still get on so well with them is because I have been here for so long. Kids here are very suspicious of someone new and will take a while to accept a new member of staff. I was here for six years in the seventies, then I was away for a time, but I've been back now for fourteen years. I'm part of the furniture and I have taught a lot of their parents as well. As recently as a month ago, I ran into some kids that I taught in the seventies and they always reminisce about school. I'm part of the community even though I don't live here.

Part Two

Modeling good relationships, developing supportive structures – to change classrooms, schools and the world

Boys ask to and need to learn about relationships with women and girls. They desire to have good relationships with women and girls. The school is a mini social system and boys notice and learn a lot about gender relations from the structures and adult relationships they see in the school. They negotiate their own relationships and make choices based on the models they see around them.
While teachers' classroom skills are crucial aspects of boyswork, school organisation is also important. At Kurri Kurri High School they are modifying the structures already existing within their school. The School Improvement Team was used as a basis for setting up team structures and relationships that supported learning and created the kinds of relationships they wanted in the school.

Susan Boyleen and Tony Moore used the existing Year Seven classroom organisation to combine two Year 7 classes. They created a team teaching opportunity using single sex classes in the mornings and a combined class in the afternoons.

Both case studies illustrate how a pilot project can be conducted, written up and evaluated, then used as a model for future years. Susan and Tony in Perth are documenting the academic results of both the boys and girls to demonstrate the effectiveness of their program. Other year six and seven teachers are now using their team teaching approach.

At Kurri Kurri High, the Boys Action Team was set up within the School Improvement Team to deal with specific programs and issues for boys. The Boys Action Team is writing up its boys program into curriculum units to be used across the school.

Beverley Theobold describes how she used the structures of teams within her school, to develop the kinds of programs and relationships that she wanted to model for the boys and the girls. She describes how, as a woman principal, she modeled particular ways of exercising power and responsibility. By attending, but not chairing meetings, she challenged the notions that being powerful always means competition with someone else or exercising power over someone else. She suggests ways that women principals can look after the interests of boys as well as girls and can have equitable and respectful relationships with both men and women staff members. The team structures encouraged authority by each person and with others, rather than power over others. She suggests these structures can support all staff and students to take responsibility for themselves and others, which is a particularly powerful message for boys.

Susan Boylen and Tony Moore describe their classroom organisation of splitting into single sex classes for English and Maths and a mixed class for other subjects. They also describe particular language strategies that work with their boys, such as structuring discussions with a 'yes' bag, spotlight theatre, and physical activities.

They are thrilled with the difference that single sex classes have made to the learning of both the boys and the girls and to different groups within the boys and the girls. They describe how their collaborative approach can encourage both the boys and the girls to do well in all subjects, and not limit themselves to narrow choices based on stereotyped notions of what is acceptable for each gender.

Susan and Tony discuss how men and women, by teaching in collaborative teaching teams can model respectful, equitable, and supportive working relationships that expand the children's notions of gender relations. They describe how their classroom organisation has allowed them to explicitly teach social skills and gender relations to the children, and to explore their own ideas on gender relations. They have been able to utilise the gendered resources that each brings to the teaching team.

They emphasise how social relations are aspects of every subject, and both boys and girls need to explicitly learn the skills of cooperation, assertiveness and expressing emotions. Each gender can learn from the strengths of the other. Their classroom organisation, of single sex for part of the day and then joined for the rest of the day, has created a cooperative and safe emotional environment for both the boys and the girls.

There are opportunities to attempt to create relationships between male and female staff and students that are as we would like them to be - fair, equitable, just, collaborative, respectful and enjoyable. The teachers in these case studies speak fondly of their collaborative relationships with each other and with the boys and girls. We can create structures that support these kinds of relationships.

While inequalities between men and women continue to exist in society and in schools, women teachers have been engaged in changing and overcoming these obstacles in schools and society for many years. Boyswork offers more opportunities to work with male colleagues, boys and girls to create schools that enhance the learning of all students by also developing and supporting the positive social goals we have for boys and girls.

Case Study One
Beverley Theobald

Beverley Theobald is currently the principal of Kurri Kurri High School in the Maitland district, NSW. Her case study concentrates on her role as principal of that school and the changes for boys the school has been able to implement with her leadership.

Kurri Kurri is a small country town in Eastern NSW. Kurri Kurri High is on the disadvantaged schools program because the majority of our school population are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The school has 850 students and we're the only high school in the town. The community was originally a mining community. A number of the mines have closed down and consequently there's quite a bit of unemployment in the area. Another consequence of it being a mining community is that education particularly for boys, was traditionally undervalued, because boys often followed their fathers into the mines and they had a big income. But that doesn't fit the community any more, so there is a need to raise the awareness about the need for education for the kids in the community.

This team approach changes the whole culture of the school. We move to a sharing caring school.

I've been at the school four years, since the beginning of 1995. When I started there, the school had a fairly traditional curriculum and timetable structure. It seemed to me, and some of the people who had been at the school for a while who were talking about it when I got there, that the structure didn't suit the students any more. So we have actually made considerable changes to the timetable and the curriculum structure of the school over the past four years.

Team Building

My role modeling as a woman principal is really important. I mean role modeling in the sort of culture and behaviours that I portray, as well as what I do in the school community. Part of what I've been doing since I've been at the school is trying to build teams. So each staff team is working with students, but down the track I believe that this team approach changes the whole culture of the school. We move to a sharing, caring school by doing that.

Our Boys Action Team consists of male and female members, including a female parent.

No bullying

It's fairly obvious to people in the way that I work, that I don't believe in punitive discipline. I don't believe in bullying or harassment, and that includes teacher bullying, which is not allowed in my school. Some teachers have traditionally seen bullying as a way to operate with students, and they now know that that's not acceptable in our school community.

School Improvement Team

The original concept, when I started, was to set up a School Improvement Team. The School Improvement Team takes on areas of the school and tries to improve the school as a whole. The School Improvement Team uses action research. We collect a lot of data and then we make recommendations based on what we've gathered. Then we collaborate or consult with the community on proposals. Then we move into action from there. We've done a lot of research and we've ended up embarking on a middle school approach. One of the things that we have done as a consequence of that is established a Boys Action Team.

Boys Action Team (BAT)

The Boys Action Team operates as part of the School Improvement Team. The Boys Action Team is involved in four basic areas: interpersonal relations, anti bullying, motivation and literacy and numeracy. We're up to various stages in strategies for each of those.

Our Boys Action Team consists of male and female members. The boys' coordinator is a male, but there are females in that team, including a female parent. There's a male parent and a female parent. So it's looking at whole school strategy to assist the boys.

Interpersonal relations and self esteem

For example, the boy's coordinator has, in one of our programs, worked with a small group of Year 8 boys on the interpersonal relations strategy. In the program he's trying to build self-esteem, trying to make the boys understand what is acceptable classroom behaviour, how you should behave and interact in the playground. He's worked with an itinerate teacher, who is a female, in a team teaching approach. They taught the boys to juggle over a period of six weeks. They actually made the balls and then they learnt to juggle. But throughout the whole process they were also having fun, they were building their self-esteem, they were working as a group, so they were learning group teaming techniques.

It also led into talking about behaviour and how to manage behaviour in the playground and so on. It seems to have worked with that group of boys. They are fitting into school a lot better. They're very pleased when they see the boys' coordinator around the school because they have someone to relate to. A couple of the parents have actually phoned the school and said that it has had an impact on home behaviour as well.

We've written up the work that's been done with those boys into units of work.

Trialing new strategies

The other aspect to it, from our school's structure point of view or strategy point of view, is that we have written up the work that's been done with those boys into actual units of work. So it was a pilot program, that is now available for other teachers to be using as well. This seems to us to be a good method to use, because you're getting double value out of it. You're trialing it, but then it becomes available for wider use. And the other members of staff don't have to start at the beginning because it's already been done.

Modeling equal relationships in authority positions

I think that, when I first came to the school, the boys, the girls and the community thought it was fairly unusual to have a female principal. Everybody did. I was the first female principal in the school. But I think now that they don't see that as unusual. I think one of the reasons is that they see that I work very well with all the teams that operate in the school.

The School Improvement Team for example, has student representation as well, and they see me in that team, but not as the chairperson of the team, which is quite deliberate. They also see that I work very effectively with my senior executives, one of whom is a male and one of whom is a female, and that there is a very equal team relationship at that level too. The students can see that as well. So I think that surely must make people question what were traditional values about leadership.

Case Study Two

Susan Boylen & Tony Moore

Susan Boylen and Tony Moore are experienced primary teachers working at Clarkson Primary School, a large urban primary school in Perth, Western Australia. Since the beginning of 1999, they have been conducting a pilot project in their combined Year 7 classes. They are trialing single sex classes for English and Maths, and a combined class for other activities.

Susan: We have two classes of Year 7 students. They're aged 11 turning 12. We have worked with those students last year in 1998, as one group with two teachers. This year we have separated them in the morning sessions, which go through to about 12.20pm. Tony works with the boys during that time on Language and Maths and I work with the girls. Then we recombine in the afternoon and work on things such as technology and information technology subjects together.

Tony: I guess the reason behind why we did that, and why we were excited about having a separate boys class in the very beginning was from the information from Steve Biddulph and other things we read. I went to a conference that Steve held in Perth and then I listened to Richard Fletcher talk at a Sydney conference and then again here in Perth. We decided, when we spoke to him, that it was worth the risk. It was a chance that we could do some good but we certainly couldn't do any harm. Every single parent was asked if they wanted their kid to be involved in this. We explained our rationale behind it and they supported it.

We were interested in finding out why the boys weren't doing as well as we thought they should.

First up was the fact that the literacy results were frighteningly poor for everybody, but particularly the boys. We were interested in finding out why the boys weren't doing as well as we thought they should. They didn't seem to be cottoning onto the learning. There were a disproportionate number of boys who were going through an EMB system. Previous to this particular year, there were lots of problems with boys just doing the wrong thing for no apparent reason. We were also thinking it was a bit unfair for the girls who always seem to be trying really hard to do the right thing, and then having a lot of their class time spent in disciplining other people, again mostly boys.

We'd have juggling breaks between lessons.

Catering for different learning styles

It would be difficult to get away from the fact that there's lots of foolishness that goes on in the boys room. But when we need to get it back on track it seems to happen more readily. There's lots of good learning that goes on. We teach the same content as the other Year 7 teacher of a mixed class. We work on pretty much the same things, it's just a different way of presenting and getting the information to the kids. And I guess different expectations.

We do a lot of activity based stuff. Up until the start of this semester, there'd be lots of breaks. We'd have juggling breaks between lessons, and other physical activities such as exercises, between each lesson. Susan does that as well, but I would say that I'd go outside more often and we are certainly more boisterous. There's a lot more noise in the boy's classroom than there is in the girl's classroom.

There's a lot more noise in the boys' classroom than in the girl's classroom.

Susan: We've both been aware of the needs of boys particularly, and all students I guess, not to sit for hours, and we would always schedule in things like juggling. One of the things we noticed once we separated and went into the single sex classes, was the girls were actually happier to go for a lot longer period before they have those breaks. In fact, they probably find them in the frequency they were before, more intrusive, whereas the boys really need them and they tend to get off task without them. So it's allowed us to cater more for the interests of those two groups a little more easily.

We try and do a mixture of most things because the things that we strive towards with the co-operation in groups is something that is a necessary skill for everyone. But the girls certainly operate in those situations, particularly at the start, much more readily. They take to working in groups and sharing information more easily. I think the traditional type of schooling does suit them fairly well. So we do a lot of co-operative group work, a lot of sharing of ideas. The girls tend to be more responsive to print orientated things. They love having sheets and files and things. They find that intrinsically rewarding.

Tony: Whereas my boys would find that a bit of a chore, the file keeping. I've actually done a little bit of a trial. The first five weeks of this term, I haven't gone outside as a regular activity. And the boys have constantly asked me 'Can we go outside? Are we having this today? Are we having daily fitness? Are we going outside to practice athletics?' So next week we start with going outside again, because the first two weeks was fantastic but then after that the interest waned, from being scholarly to being more disruptive.

You can talk when you've got hold of the 'yes' bag and you can't talk unless you've got the bag.

Structuring discussions

We have lots and lots of discussions. In fact there's probably so much talking that we don't get a lot of written work done, which is maybe a problem but at the same time, the content of the written work now shows a lot more thought.

The 'Yes Bag'

We have a system where everyone gets a fair go. So if we're talking we have what we call a 'Yes Bag', which means you can talk when you've got hold of the bag and you can't talk unless you've got the bag. It's nothing brand new but boys love those rules. They love the structure to it.

Spotlight Theatre

Just today in fact, we had a discussion about ways of relating. Instead of getting someone back and doing the same thing that they did to you that you didn't enjoy, you can show power by saying 'This is how I would have done it if you'd asked me the first time', or 'This is how I prefer this to be done'. We do role plays on those sorts of things. We call it Spotlight Theatre, where we put actions into a story.

We talked about war and about Vietnam and instead of just reading it, we put it into actions. So we had a group who were being the Vietnamese and having their say and then there was another group who were the Australian protesters, and there was another group who were the soldiers that were conscripted. It generated an incredible amount of interest, but it's not completely structured. The boys like to know that they're going to get their turn. It's not going to stop before they say what they want to say.

Susan: I know there are also differences within the group of girls, and within the group of boys. Compared to most classes, the girls group still does a lot more of the breaks and the left / right brain stuff that we always have done. It's always been one of Tony's and my philosophies to be very aware of the different learning styles that students employ and that people have those different skills and different preferences.

He's an incredibly quiet boy who's blossomed in the all boys' class.

Tony: I think we've probably broadened it because we're so aware of it. Susan and I are almost soul mates in the way we think. Like we can almost read each other's minds, we've worked so long together. I can say something and she'll be thinking the same thing and put it a different way.

Susan: We certainly aim to take care of the differences within the group and separating the boys from the girls, probably allowed us a little more flexibility doing that.

Positive outcomes for boys and girls

Tony: I had a mum who just last term came to me and said 'My boy's loving being in the all boys' classroom because he feels that he can talk to you about anything'. His mum had made the comment that he was far, far more confident and felt able to say anything without being mocked when he was in the boy's classroom. He's an incredibly quiet boy who's blossomed in the all boys' class. He doesn't allow other boys to push him around now. He's very happy to have his say.

Susan: At the moment we're involved in some testing using the same test we used to identify the problem with the boys. So we'll be looking to see if those results have changed in the next couple of weeks. There's a lot of anecdotal evidence. Tony mentioned his boys. We've also noticed there's a group of girls that we think, in retrospect, probably haven't competed very well with boys for a share of attention, in the past. They're not as good academically and so they've tended to sit quietly, whereas the boys have demanded more of our time if they're struggling, because the behaviours they choose are much more in your face.

So there's been about three or four girls who have really come out of themselves in the all girls class. They have really made some good ground in areas like spelling and expressing themselves and have become a lot more confident, just because there's probably been more teacher time available to them. This has been really good for those girls because they've made some gains that I suspect they wouldn't have made had they just stayed in a normal mixed class

Parent Support for boys solving problems

Tony: It's also a little bit easier to get to talk to parents about their kids' progress because it's a new thing and the parents are a little more interested in it. I speak to parents almost every day. They come down to talk to me in the boy's classroom, and they'll chat quite happily about their kids.

Boys taking responsibility

We always talk about kids taking responsibility for their actions. Everything we do is a choice and the onus is back on them. So, I left my homework at home, well I chose to leave homework at home and now I have to face the consequences. The kids just model what you say and that's the key to it I think. Susan and I model what we think is acceptable and it's probably middleclass views but Susan reads, I read, Susan's sporty I'm sporty, Susan jokes around, I joke around. We want to model that balance, and I think the kids copy that quite well. I'm sure they take the mickey out of us after school but...!

There's a greater acceptance of responsibility by the whole group and it's working more equitably.

Team teaching and learning in a mixed group

Susan: We have a responsibility for the general planning of an area and then you have to be very flexible according to the type of thing that you're doing. If it's the type of lesson where one person is delivering some form of content, then if it's myself, I might be in the middle of the room and he'll be floating around perhaps supporting by keeping kids on task, or helping kids that might require assistance. Other times it's group work where they're partnered or in groups that are mixed, and they'll be moving around the room and we'll just be facilitators in that type of situation.

In subjects like Information Technology, where they're using computers, we try and have them working in mixed groups to practice those skills that they've worked at as separated classes. They're getting a chance to test their assertiveness and test their ability to co-operate and come to fair solutions, rather than what we've observed before, where the boys aren't going to pack up because they don't want to and the girls will pack up because they want the job done. We are seeing a difference in those kinds of situations where there's a greater acceptance of responsibility by the whole group and it's working more equitably.

Being explicit about gender relations in mixed classes

Susan: Their behaviours are starting to change. They've always had that model from Tony and I, and we often almost role model situations of conflict and resolving it and showing them compromise. But they are starting to be able to do that themselves. Some of the girls that were much quieter and probably easily pushed around are becoming a lot more assertive. We talk about it while they're in groups and we reflect when we finish one of those activities on how did our co-operation go and what could have we done better. It seems to be working.

Developing personal relationships with students

Tony: We often tell stories about our personal lives so that the kids know that my wife is having a baby. They've seen the footage of the ultrasound and Susan talks about what she'll be able to do as the Auntie of this child. I guess Susan and I are lucky teachers, special teachers in that we're friends to a lot of our kids. Quite often we'll have kids who ring you at home to check that they've got the right homework and more often than not, it's not that they've got to check to see that their homework is done, they just want to talk to some familiar voice. Today there was a wonderful little card from a boy whose mother and father have separated and she had to leave the country for a short time. I don't know that we really did anything special but we just talked to this kid. He rang up a fair few times at my house, 'Do you reckon I should get this done for homework?' Susan has lunch with her girls, the girls often do lunch together.

Susan: I think it's really important, that we've had these kids last year so we know them very well and they know each other very well. I think that was quite critical in our decision to have single sex classes. I don't know that I would be that comfortable or interested in single sex classes as an all day, everyday situation. It would be very difficult to reintegrate in the afternoon if you didn't come from knowing each other quite well.

Tony: The other thing too is that we've got the support of every single kid who's in our class. There's not one kid whose parent didn't have a choice to put their kid in that class. That's a very, very rare thing and there are a number of parents who wanted their kids to come into our classes and we just didn't have the room.

Susan: I just think it's worth reiterating that neither of us see single sex classes as the solution to everything. We have been quite excited about what our kids have been doing for us and with us. But there is also to me, that very strong background that we have with the kids where they just try so hard for us anyway and we have that knowledge of them and their families. I would be wary just saying to someone 'Walk in cold with a group of kids, shove them into separate boys and girls classes and Hey, it will all happen!'

Teachers as role models for their own gender

As a team we're really conscious of gender relations. We're both quite into sport. We cycle, run, go to the gym, do things like that and we make the kids very aware of that. I've talked with the girls about the physical challenges of being involved in a healthy lifestyle. This is another thing that's good when you have that time alone to talk about issues that relate particularly to your own gender. So I guess from each of us, for both boys and girls they see what I hope is a positive role model for a female that can be involved in things and be healthy and lots of fun as well. And Tony does the same from a boy's point of view.

Tony: I like to show the emotional side and like to explain to the boys why and how I feel. Recently I lost my brother-in-law and the boys got together and wrote a card. Susan's girls got together and wrote a little card and I came back in and after a couple of days of being at home very sad. I came to school and I explained. When I lost it with some kid who wasn't doing the right thing I just said to them, 'I'm really sorry, that was a stupid thing to do because you didn't do anything wrong, I just feel awful inside'. I cry in front of them every now and then when something really awful happens like that. And so I guess I like to be very open and show my emotions. At the same time I'll tell a few porkies and we always tell stories that gets some point across. I think that the key is to show your underbelly, the soft underbelly.

Susan: We like to model working together well with the kids so that they see that males and females working together is a really positive and worthwhile thing. There are many different kinds of role models out there for them in their own families. A lot of them are from single parent families and might not even have the example of two people working together.

One of the really powerful things for the boys has been Tony doing all the model writing and reading to them.

Tony: We try to make sure that there's no stereotypical thing, that I don't teach Maths better than Susan. We certainly avoid any competition, although we do have our friendly banter about our particular partner's running speed and all those sorts of things. So there's a bit of a frivolity there.

Susan: We discussed that in the initial stages of setting up the classes as single sex, because prior to that, our two interests were different. Tony leans more to the Maths and myself more to the Language. We tossed up whether I would perhaps do the Language for both groups and Tony would do the Maths. But we felt that would be very stereotypical. The message for girls is boys do Maths. It's a boys thing so the female disappears, and the same for boys with Language: that it's a girl's thing. One of the really powerful things for the boys I think has been Tony doing all the model writing and the reading to them.

Tony: One of the boys has had at least a year and half with us. The question to the class was 'Can you read too many books?'. And this particular boy said 'Well, Mr Moore, whenever you describe say 'door', you say 'it's a nice door'. Miss Boylen says 'It's a magnificent door and it's got a beautiful view'. But I've noticed this year, you seem to use the words just like she does. It's good, I think you've increased your vocabulary.' That was just mind blowing. He was so proud of himself that he put the word vocabulary in a sentence, but what he was saying was true.

Susan: I think you do have to be careful that, in taking responsibilities for different subjects, you don't promote stereotypes, which don't help either boys or girls. Particularly boys, who have so few male role models in primary schools, can get the feeling about any subject, that it is only for the girls.

Teaching collaboratively

Tony: There have probably been two or three occasions where we've gone home snotty nosed with each other. We've always practiced what we preach and there are times where Susan's gotten angry with me. 'Don't hand that to me like I'm your secretary'. And I've said, 'Well hold on, who's tired here?' Or Susan will say, 'If you've got that problem deal with it at home, leave it there.' So we usually chat and clear any air.

Susan: Like any relationship it has it's moments but they're pretty few and far between. The kids are really a good part of that relationship. They're so positive about what we do that it's become progressively easier in some respects. It was probably harder for Tony at the start of this year, taking on the boys because they are a much more difficult group with a lot less interest in what school as an institution has to offer. I think he's been under a lot more stress for that reason this term. But we do work really well together and we seem to be able to solve any problems that we have, and our partners seem to survive the experience.

It was harder for Tony taking on the boys because they are a more difficult group.

Tony: We are a close family and we are lucky that we two teachers can talk about it. Susan is very supportive of me and I hope I'm very supportive of her. When one of my boys has done something that I take the responsibility for, I can tell her what it is and she'll listen and she might say, 'Well could you have done it any better? What else do you think you can do?' Or she might even agree and say, 'Well look, think about where he comes from. Basically you're not going to change him in four hours of school.' And it just brings you back to earth. Whereas if you didn't have that teaching partner who cared about you and about your kids, you'd go home and probably stop teaching fairly shortly afterwards because it is a stressful job.

Susan: The school is in a socioeconomic area that is fairly depressed and it is a huge primary school. It's over a thousand kids and so it has a lot of pressures that you inherit as I suppose all teachers do. We really find that having the two of us team teaching actually makes it easier and it's more supportive. I think that's the reason more and more of our staff are actually moving towards a team teaching, collaborative way of doing it.

I was probably convinced that classrooms had to be quiet in order for learning to take place.

One of the things that I really noticed when Tony and I first started this cooperative teaching, was the amount of noise that suddenly I was working within. It's been really interesting. I've worked cooperatively with other females but I've tended to have a much quieter room and probably have expended, when I reflect now, far too much of my time and energy creating this quiet room. I was probably convinced that classrooms had to be quiet in order for learning to take place and to show that everyone was on the task. When I first started teaching with Tony and he'd be the main one taking a lesson, it seemed to me there was noise everywhere. I'd be looking around thinking 'God, if anyone walks past what are they going to think is going on?' But then you realise that the noise was because they were all involved in making something or doing something. I've learnt from Tony about relaxing amongst the noise and spreading out more and just have a goal and letting them get involved

Boys like open discussions about the things they want to talk about.

and get their hands dirty or whatever. I think that's been a really good thing for me and my teaching, that I've learnt from him as a male teacher. I think that's something he brings to the classroom.

I bring the balance. I bring the quieter side, the more reflective side. I think that balance is what makes it work. And that's more my contribution: the quiet yet fun side.

Tony: I'm happier to make a goof head of myself and to be the fool to get a teaching point across. So quite often I'll pretend to be a different character, put on a silly voice, be 'Mad Pierre the Mathematician' who gets everything wrong.

Susan: And I'm like the stooge in the audience that gets them all going.

Tony: Susan is the straight one I'm the funnyman but it's not that simple. I would have said that early on in our teaching partnership, but definitely not now. I bring a positive role model, my ability to share my enthusiasm, my ability or intention to communicate. Not that I get it all right all the time. I'm happy to let kids solve their problems rather than 'Do as I say, do as I do'. I get them discussing their feelings. Boys like open discussions about things they want to talk about. Like, we'll be talking about body parts, and instead of using the slang words to describe things we'll use the correct anatomy terms, and then it doesn't phase me and I can give them some good information.

Program changes and constraints

Susan: To me it's still in some respects early days. It's the first time we've ever done anything like this. The only things I would like to change at this stage are the very practical issues of things like timetables. We're in such a huge school that in some respects some of the timetabling issues are quite inflexible and they don't always work in the best possible way for our particular circumstances. That's of course the real world that you live in. You can't always get what you want.

Tony: Sometimes you try. Most times they've been able to make allowances for us. But there are certain things, like when other teachers wouldn't allow sixty kids to go to Phys Ed at the same time, which is a logistic nightmare. This means we've got half a class staying back and the other half have gone. We didn't always have collaborative time to work together to discuss things. But on most occasions the school has actually helped us out because this is a trial and they're doing their best to make it work.

Boys learn through the particular person.

Susan: I suppose teachers always feel this now, that you just never seem to have enough time to do the things you want to do. We seem to be wanting at the moment to do more than ever, and you just wish sometimes that the day was longer because you just feel like you're just getting into something and you're due somewhere else.

Tony: It would be magical too if we could have huge rooms. We would very much love to have bigger rooms just to spread out. We love to go outside and sit out on the carpet or sit outside on the grass and just be there. Our room is jammed packed with kids.

Long term relationships

We take into consideration that some boys don't want to sit next to another boy. We let the kids choose where they want to sit so they're getting the best educational opportunities that they can afford themselves.

I don't think I would want to do team teaching and single sex classes with anyone I didn't know as well as Susan, who didn't have the same philosophy to almost 100 percent.

Susan: In our school this year a number of teachers have brought their children on from last year to this year and are looking at perhaps doing two year rotation. As a model, what we've done this year is reasonably useful for the teachers of Year 6, that will probably take their kids through to Year 7. It would be well worth them considering.

A lot of the stuff you see coming out from boys now seems to very strongly suggest that boys learn through the particular person. Now if we'd split the groups without knowing those kids I think I would have battled with the time I spent with the boys, trying to establish myself. Whereas when I come to those boys now, they know me so well that there aren't any issues there, and they will learn with me. Kids are inspiring to be around so it's not that difficult.

Part Three

Working with our communities – to learn from each other

This section illustrates the variety of socioeconomic, cultural and geographical circumstances of boys in schools and the strategies developed by teachers to address these. Boys negotiate their gender identities in these particular social situations and differences amongst them abound. Accepting and utilising the strengths of the boys' situation, and the ideas about gender that come from that situation, is an important principle of boyswork. All of the case studies in this section highlight the need for teachers to develop strong relationships with the communities of their students.

Working with community strengths

Cheryl Hallinan, principal of an area school in rural New South Wales, describes how the school acknowledged and worked with the community situation in order to develop appropriate programs for the boys. In her community, there is full employment, and boys, particularly, often leave school early to enter rural employment or work on family farms as well as attending school.

As many boys worked long hours driving during harvest times, the school set up homework timetables that allowed for a lighter homework load during harvest time and a heavier workload at other times. Families often took holidays after harvest, during school time, and worked through school holidays of Christmas and Easter. The school developed self-directed units of work that could be taken on family holidays. The school asked the fathers, then on holidays, to work with the boys to ensure the units were completed. The school also developed individual education programs for a number of transient boys whose families travelled regularly to take advantage of seasonal work.

Jenni Griffith and Greg Griffith also stress the importance of working with community members, in their case, elder Aboriginal community members, whose cultural knowledge was the basis of a program designed to enhance the social skills of Aboriginal boys. In another context, Helene Boyer was able to develop the self-esteem of a troubled boy by developing a mutually respectful relationship with one father, in her school in rural Tasmania. Changes came about when the father, initially antagonistic and aggressive to the school, came to work in the school as a teacher's aide.

Recruiting men

It is important for women principals and teachers to develop ways to recruit men to collaborate in the work with boys. Sometimes indirect methods work best. Women principals can develop school structures and community relationships that acknowledge the importance of fathers' participation in decision making about their children, and therefore be inclusive of the fathers.

Cherly Hallinan set up a father figure program for boys identified as needing help in her school. She worked with men in her community, the fathers, the bush fire brigade, APEX and Rotary Club members, to provide support to these boys. She worked with a male staff member to communicate with fathers who were reluctant to discuss issues of their son's education with a woman principal.

Jenni Griffith, in an Aboriginal community school, took on the role of facilitator and advocate for the community program run by the men in the Aboriginal community. She did not work directly with the boys.

Acknowledging community strengths and challenging community perceptions

As well as acknowledging the strengths of each community, teachers must also understand community problems and underlying emotional issues for boys whose behaviour is difficult. The teachers and leaders here describe the challenges of their dual role, both to acknowledge and utilise the strengths of the community situation, and to challenge dangerous practices within the community, such as excessive drinking, or prevailing attitudes like homophobia, that limit options for boys.

Helene Boyer discusses the role that she, as a woman principal, has had in both respecting and challenging the notions of gender in the depressed rural area where she works. As a woman principal, she has taken up issues such as sexism and appropriate behaviour, in order to enhance the opportunities for both boys and girls in her school, and in order to develop cooperative relationships with the school community.

She suggests that in the primary school setting, play is an important avenue for boys to be able to express themselves emotionally and physically. She discusses the need to set up situations in school where boys' humour and physical energy can have a positive expression. She suggests that while sport is an accepted form for this expression, dance could also be used if community attitudes towards boys and dance could be broadened.

Cheryl Hallinan suggests that women teachers can also challenge prevailing attitudes towards gender and education and therefore provide safety for boys to broaden their options within rural masculine identities. She describes her school's attempts to video past students who have had successful careers in non-traditional areas such as the arts, to provide role-models for boys exploring other options to farm work. She also describes supporting boys with issues of sexuality in a situation where homosexuality is not accepted.

Jenni and Greg Griffith describe how they, as non-indigenous educators, worked with each other, and with the community, to develop a culturally appropriate gender specific program for Aboriginal boys. They highlight how different cultures have different notions of masculinity and how educators must respect and work with any community to develop an appropriate program for their boys. The initial impetus for the program came from the need to address difficult social issues relevant to the boys, such as suicide, social isolation and violence. The program built up the boys' self esteem by addressing these issues in a culturally appropriate way. Jenni describes her role in the project as developing networks of community agencies so that the school could be in partnership with other welfare agencies in addressing the social needs of the boys.

These case studies illustrate the importance of the links between the social and emotional needs of boys and the academic needs of boys. School structures and programs can address all of these. By working with the community, women teachers can initiate programs to meet these needs in diverse groups of boys. They can develop practices in working with communities and students that respect differences. Women teachers and leaders can support the community's involvement in school programs, and the role of men in working with boys, while maintaining authority in their own roles.

Case Study One

Helene Boyer

Helene Boyer is principal of Deloraine Primary School in North Tasmania, which has 320 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. For the previous two years she was principal of an area school with classes from Kindergarten to Year ten, in the Northern Region of Tasmania. She has been a Performing Arts Advisor for both primary and secondary schools and was a founder of the Gambit Theatre Company in Launceston, one of the longest running young people's theatre companies in Australia.

A Case Study

There was a little boy who I first encountered when he was in Grade 6, when he was eleven. His intellectual capacity was such that he was receiving special funding. He was the middle child in a family of three boys and he came from a home which was full of domestic violence, where there was drug and alcohol abuse, where there was little care and control. He used to throw rocks at anybody. He was full of aggression and alienation. He had real problems with anger management and no self-esteem.

We tried to offer him a number of levels of support. Up until the time when we started this support, dad's involvement in the school had been to come and scream abuse and behave in a very aggressive way. He was a very aggressive man towards anyone who attempted to get him to talk about the child.

During the first three months I was at the school, there was an incident where I wrote to him and said, 'If you come onto my school campus again and harass people as you did today, I will need to call the police and have a restraint order made against you.' So it probably couldn't have got to a worse scenario with this family. The little boy would often be in the timeout room or needed to be extracted from class because his response to stress was to become very, very aggressive.

We did lots of home visits to dad. We sent men to do it.

A part of our school is that we all work as a team, and we don't believe in just sending children to the timeout room. If the child doesn't have a chance to repair and rebuild and to think through, well what's the point of isolating them? I am a very tactile person and I was sitting next to him in the timeout room talking to him and I just started rubbing the middle of his back. And the more I rubbed the more he kind of pressed towards me because he didn't ever want me to stop and he started to cry. He sobbed for about forty minutes and during this sobbing he started saying to me 'I hate this school, I'm coming to burn it down, I'm gonna getcha', and all that angry stuff. But through the forty minutes, he told me that he was the worst in his family; that the others were all better than him; that the only way that he could feel strong was to be worse than anyone else; and that no one liked him and he was so unhappy.

We decided to put a plan around this child where we took him out of his school for two days a week and he went to another context where he got the opportunity to do lots of stuff that he really loved, hands on stuff. And he felt really good because in the school environment his peers always put him down. He had a chance to go somewhere else and be a new person with a clean slate. But then he would bring his confidence back into our school. We did lots of home visits to dad. We sent men to do it (male teaching staff) and they had lots of kitchen conferences.

Dad is now working as an aide in the school. I'm not going to say that this boy has stopped throwing rocks because it's a pattern he's done for eleven years, but he certainly is much less aggressive than he was before. He identifies much more strongly with his learning program. He's feeling so proud that his dad's now working in their school. The staff are beginning to see a real bond happening between the family and the school. And that's about not making judgements about dad. But strangely enough, it was all started with writing the letter to him saying 'This is not an appropriate way to behave.' And I thank him for his generosity in respecting me as the principal for telling him that, and still being prepared to go back and work in the school. They're the sorts of little wins you have on the journey.

Gender linked with other issues

I have a belief that leadership at the moment in schools is about actually changing the nature of classroom interactions for both genders and enhancing the learning outcomes for all students. But there are specific strategies and issues around the genders. It would better inform our practice if we look at the research and if we do some action research in our schools.

The issues related to boys are to do with behaviour management, when they want to push the edges of schools that are essentially a middle class framework. When we are exploring the construction of gender, we need to look at the socioeconomic circumstances, and the nature of the community that surrounds the school, and what the traditional gender roles might have been there.

There are three R's in schools: relationships, relationships and relationships.

It's also got to do with the use and abuse of power. I think that much of the work that we do with boys in particular, is seeking to address their disempowerment. This is all highly complex and we're still really at the cutting edge of working out how people learn, and the constructions of the world that they bring to school, and the perspectives they bring into the classroom.

One of the things I do know, is that if young boys do not have emotional nurturing, if they have trauma and aggressive surroundings and environments, then they may also choose to operate in those ways. They are primarily kinesthetic. They are expressive and they act out physically, compared to girls who tend to use a more language based approach. But I think there's more to it than that.

I think the reason why girls don't respond to some of the schooling that isn't meeting their needs in such an outwardly rejecting way as the boys do, is that girls are still taught to be quiet, passive and to toe the line and to stay within the rules. But increasingly I'm seeing more of the gender lines blurring and it doesn't really matter if it's boys or girls. With children who are in need in my school area, there's a total lack of trusting in adults in the world around them, it's emotional alienation. It's more than that. It's actually that they carry inside the centre of themselves a big dead vacant space, and this directs a lot of their behaviour.

Because the children I'm working with are very young, they actually don't have the skills to rationalise, or to analyse what's happening. So they're often responding, almost like an open wound, to the pain that they're feeling. The children who often get into the most trouble are often the ones who never have an absentee day from the school. They manage to get themselves to school often against the most extreme odds because I think they know that they are in a caring environment. We might not be meeting their needs in terms of learning, but they know that people care around them. So it's a place to start. I think there are three 'R's in schools: Relationships, Relationships, Relationships.

I enjoy boys' free expression of love in their cuddles, in their wrestling, in their energy through space, their testing their body against the elements in the world.

How boys like to learn

So for me, in my school, the test will be to look at the good research we have about how boys learn. I think they learn by doing rather than talking about it. I think they tend to be the active learners rather then people who'd be able to take it in visually or verbally. And if that's the case I think they learn better through play. I certainly see that boys play better than girls, in the sense that they love the intricacies of challenge and three dimensional hands-on kind of stuff. When I've worked in performing arts or visual arts with much older children, it would always be the boys who'd get in there and play with the materials and the girls would hang back on the edges.

I don't think that we're born with it, I think that it is about encouraging and developing and nurturing those skills. But unfortunately in many of our schools, boys' desires to have hands-on experiences, boys' desire to be expressing themselves in three dimensional space, is misunderstood and regarded as being uncontrollable and therefore not allowed into the strictly designed physical space of our classrooms.

Boys' humour and energy

I've always liked boys because they have a different sense of humour to women. I like boys because they have a kind of a larrikin style. I quite like that Australian style of the boys who'll make some kind of joke with you. They're actually very good at it, even though we suggest that they're not quite as sophisticated as girls in their use of language. They just operate in different ways.

The other thing I love about boys is their expressive, kinesthetic ability which society tries very hard to wipe out from an early age. I enjoy their free expression of love in their cuddles, in their wrestling, in their energy through space, in their testing their body against the elements in the world. As someone who's taught dance, I think men's dance is probably the most powerful physical expression that I know.

One of the greatest things I saw just recently was a male dance piece by a group of older men who came from a sheltered workshop. It was so beautiful because of the tenderness and the gentleness and the joy in touching one another's bodies and in being free to express their feelings. But they had that power of the male body, which is a different quality to girls. And so I think men have the ability, boys have the ability, to be able to help women be better people, because they bring something into this mix of having the two genders that can balance an atmosphere, can balance an environment.

In the school (a primary school), at the moment there's only two male teachers, and they're both part-time. I came from a secondary school where there were males as part of the staff. I have missed dreadfully the repartee, the gentle teasing, which has nothing to do with bullying or harassment.

Sometimes, there's a really pragmatic way of thinking that men bring to a decision making context, and I think boys sometimes cut through stuff as well, when you're solving a problem together. They'll often say 'Hey, let's do this.' And I'm thinking 'Yes! I never would of thought of that, that's just great.'

I also think boys are really brave because it is very hard to be a boy. So many of their inclinations it seems to me, (and I don't mean horrible sexist, put down kind of inclinations, but others) are not condoned or approved of by our Anglo-Saxon repressed society. There are so few ways that boys are allowed to express themselves qualitatively. Sport is the only really approved of way of relating. Dance is an obvious alternative but the sexuality issues around that at the moment for our society, means that it's just so hard for them to be able to express themselves in that way.

I've been watching boys skateboarding and surfing for the last two days. There they are testing their bodies against the elements with the most amazing skill. Really with this great sense of being at one with their environment but at the same time controlling and managing their bodies and their minds to work with the elements. Now I don't think that's just an accident. I believe it's part of something that men have developed over many, many years, just as women have particular characteristics that they have developed over centuries. And it saddens me that there aren't enough friends to boys to revel in their maleness.

Men teachers' social role

I feel very strongly that there are times in schools where women have to realise that they can't do some things. They just don't have the right gender to do it. I'll give you an example. Some Grade 8 boys had been harassing a girl in the class with very, very bad verbal harassment of a sexual nature in describing her physical appearance. When I set out to deal with these boys, I asked the victim's permission if I could have her in the room and if she could share with them how they'd made her feel. I also asked a male teacher to be with me because he was someone that I respected very much for his empathy and ability to work with boys on respecting girls too.

'You need to know that other men don't like it.'

Once the victim had shared how she felt and the boys had acknowledged that they could understand that, I stopped speaking and this male teacher then began talk. He expressed his feelings in his voice and in his body. He was speaking very quietly. He said things like, 'You need to know that what you've done as males makes me sick to my guts. It makes me feel so ashamed that a man would choose to do this to another human being and you need to know that other men don't like it.' And I think that was a very powerful time for them. That's part of the ethical and moral environment that schools are. It's about offering young people choices for how they wish to behave in the future. Boys can take on those challenges and they try really hard next time.

Women as leaders

I think the role of leadership is about deliberately ensuring that the staff in your school no matter what gender, have been prepared to think through their own issues of sexuality and gender. And if you have a staff member who is not prepared to do that or is obviously still into limiting power games or the notion that we are there to bully children, they're not useful. And my response to that is simply to say to them, 'Look I really don't think in terms of the ethics of our school that you're going to feel very comfortable with what we're trying to do.' I give them the option of a transfer or support and opportunities to think through and develop and incorporate it into their teaching style. Often it's about working with the women more then with the men, particularly in primary schools where we have such a high percentage of females with very traditional kinds of views about schooling.

I have, though, had an experience as a female leader where there was one male teacher, a young man in his early twenties who really did behave abominably in every public session that he could. He would attempt to embarrass or shame or question my ability to be in a power situation. He had real problems with that and my response to him was to try to model for him the fact that it wasn't going to get to me. I wasn't going to play this game and I would attempt to show him how I was just going to let him put those things up and then we would talk through the issues and always come back to what's right for the children. I did have women coming up to me after one of these meetings and saying 'I can't bear the way he treats you. I don't know how you stand it.' But the bottom line is, women are here in leadership positions and they will continue to be partners with men into the future and this man had to come to terms with his own problem. It is not up to me to change him or to instruct him to do so but I will attempt to give him an opportunity to go on that journey. At the end of that year he transferred to another school.

Case Study Two

Cheryl Hallinan

Cheryl Hallinan has been a teacher and educational administrator for over 25 years. She is currently the principal of a central school in rural NSW, with classes from K to 12 and 350 pupils. In this interview she concentrates on the ways that the school has encouraged fathers to be involved in their son's education and how they have broadened the options for boys at the school.

The reasons at our school for getting moving on boy's education are exactly the same as everyone else's and the statistics are actually the same as well. I'm in a middle class community in the bush, in a rice growing area. All our results were average or better. Yet, when we really went into our evidence we found that we had a group of under performing, under achieving male students. Surprise, surprise they also linked up with behaviour referrals.

Non-completion of the School Certificate and High School Certificate was higher for us than most because we're in a situation where there are not enough workers for the jobs available. We have no unemployment in my town of 660 and my shire of 2,800. That is mainly because we have a mill, we have a large chicken processing plant and we have intensive farming that sees our farmers doing one crop straight after the next. They've just got the rice in, they're now waiting for a little bit of rain to put the wheat in and then it will be canola. So it's a three crop year. It's flat out. There's a lot of driving and there's a lot of side work keeping machinery going when it's used that much throughout the year.

As well as academic issues, dangerous behaviour is a major problem and rural youth suicide is very high.

As well as academic issues, dangerous behaviour is a major problem and rural youth suicide is very high. It most likely relates to the level within the homosexual community. Those kids have no where to go, they have no role models. If they stay in their towns we are finding more and more that they are the children that get drunk, drive into trees and have terrible accidents. But whether it is an accident is another issue of course. So we have a major problem with a typical behaviours of boys not being recognised or acknowledged.

It's a way of working with first year out teachers and inculcating them in the rights of students so we don't get that rudeness to children.

We have a huge problem with alcohol use and marijuana. Our district has high levels of arrests for possession, sale and growing.

The Boys' Program

The boys' program basically comes down to a series of things that we're doing. The program runs through a male teacher, mentoring identified students. We have students moving in and out of our schools, as many city schools have too. Ours come and go with the rural timetable. They come for crops, they go up to Queensland, have a bit of a holiday, they come back down. We have children moving in and out so it's really essential that we have early identification both of literacy and numeracy problems but also of emotional needs and other aspects particularly dealing with boys.

We use Individual Education Programs (IEP) for a number of our kids. We do it by means of folders. All the kids in the class have the same sort of folders with their work in it, but some kids have different work inside their folders when they're working in that subject.

The blokes where I am from don't particularly like me ringing them up and asking them to do things because I'm a sheila.

We also use a tutoring program for teachers which basically means me, the principal, and the head teachers coming in and working with kids in the classroom. My head teachers generally work a 30-35 period week by doing this tutorial system as well. But it's a way of working with first year out teachers and inculcating them in the rights of students and their attitudes to kids so that we don't get that rudeness to children. But it really hits our head teachers and it hits myself as principal. I don't have a deputy and I've got 350 kids. That's bigger than most country high schools but that's the way of central schools.

Involving fathers and father figures

The involvement of fathers and father figures is obviously a hot potato and I know in many city schools there often isn't a father around. We find father figures for our identified kids. That can be the local Anglican priest who is an ex-chalky and is a wonder. But we also use members of staff, we use members of the school council, we use fire fighters on the Bush Fire Brigade. They're really good, the community services blokes, we use the APEX and the Lions. We use them as father figures for our kids.

We have strategies to involve fathers. The blokes where I am from don't particularly like me ringing them and asking them to do things because I'm a sheila. So I have a couple of really good male teachers on staff, they're the ones that actually make the contact and the follow through. I have a terrific, young fourth year out Phys Ed guy who does a great deal of the ringing of parents. He can talk to fathers on a very much man-to-man basis. He does it in my office while I am there so I'm aware of what the discussion is about. Using the speakerphone I can hear what the father is saying, but the teacher is in charge of the discussion, not me.

Our aim this year has been to have a father or father figure at every meeting with any of our targeted kids. That means any positive meeting and also any negative meeting, any behaviour meeting. We've succeeded with that. Sometimes the father's not physically present. Sometimes he's on the end of a bad phone out on the farm, or on the sheep station and we're in the office with the kid and a speakerphone. The speakerphone is a way of us saying well, there is a meeting going on and the dad's here. The kids will always tell us that dad's too busy to come and mum's got to come. We're not circumventing mum and leaving her out of the loop, but a lot of our boys would much prefer us to deal with mum who will not pass that information on to their fathers. We think it's absolutely essential that some sort of relationship with dad is built. But that includes, in particular, the positives as well as the negatives.

We do joint planning of what's going to happen with the boy, how we can support him, what his need is. We explain the special IEP to the fathers and we have them involved, but not actively involved on a day to day basis, because our dads work much too hard and much too long to do that. But we hope to make contact on a weekly basis with each of these dads to see how their sons are going at home. Whether it be homework or at work experience. For many of these boys homework is not applicable.

Another aspect is Parental Planning Meetings. We have year meetings with our parents. We only have between 35-40 kids in a year group, so we're quite able to have those sort of meetings. If we put something solid on, the parents will turn up, we've found now. But it does take personal phone calls and invites. So when newsletters don't work, letters don't work you've got to have a telephone tree to ring and get them in.

At a parent's suggestion, we have instituted active monitoring and evaluation by the school council, not by us, because a lot of these people don't trust schoolies, but they do trust the evaluation of their own. We've responded to their request in targeting crisis times in our area. Our kids spend a lot of time driving auger bins and trucks and things during harvest. At that time we altered our homework

Our kids spend a lot of time driving auger bins and trucks during harvest. At that time we altered our homework procedures.

procedures. Homework dropped for that period. We acknowledge their needs but it goes back with a vengeance later. Likewise we have many holidays taken in the middle of the year. When the wheat is in, a lot of our families go on holidays at that time because there is no other time. They tend to work right through the Christmas and Easter period in particular. So we have units of work prepared that we can just take off the shelf and give to those kids at that time.

Education is seen by the school and community to be important and also of course the dads are there on holidays with them so while they're fishing or whatever they're doing, we're expecting dad to monitor that. It's been going okay so far.

Vocational education is an important focus. I was there in the late sixties with the feminist movement too and we've had lots of female role models into schools. But the reality is we need to get the male employees and employers in. We've just started setting up two videos to tape ex-pupils who turn up in town. Many of our successful role models leave town. If you go through school and you do well, you go to university, you don't ever return, you're gone for good. So when they come back to see us or come back for a twenty first or whatever, we have to grab the kid, video them and we can then use that in the educational setting through school.

One boy did drama at university, ended up being a technician doing sound and lighting stuff. He came back to tell his physics teacher that the physics we made him do in Year 12 has been the most valuable thing he's ever learnt for his work in theatre, for working in lighting and sound. The teacher felt much better but we wanted to get that on tape because you'll never get it again.

Like everyone else we've had a huge review of resources and sequences. An active learning focus is expected in every unit of work that every high school teacher does. Explicit outcomes with student self-assessment has been in for the last year and that's been really, really good with kids doing their own self-assessment. They are very silly at first but they become quite sensible. The parents look forward to the ten weekly self-assessment, that the kids do the main part of, but that the teachers also comment on.

A woman leader

The first issue for me was to be responsive to the staff and student and community concerns. The real push came up through my experience of boys. I've got four boys of my own ranging in age from 33 down to 9 years old. That gives me a bit of experience. But I sometimes have a group of parents who blame us for their boy's bad behaviour every time. 'It's your fault. What are you doing? You can't whip em, in my day they got caned, we could do something about them.'

Recently I had a hot and bothered P&C meeting and a school council meeting. At the first meeting was a group of parents, the first time all mothers, the second time mums with their husbands dragged in. I took the initiative and said 'Righto, I'm glad you're all here, thank you for coming along. Yes we've got a problem with our boys and I want you to help me. I'm going to ask you from now on every time we get a boy in I want one of you dads to get off the tractor, get out of the office, leave whatever you're doing and come in and help your boy. It's so important.' The fathers were very shocked and stepped back from that but it was too good an opportunity to lose.

We've got to acknowledge and be sensitive to specific issues of gender roles. Depression is an issue amongst boys who have problems with their gender assignment and where their sexuality is taking them, and that's a group in our school. It's a very small group but a group that I am very concerned about. We sometimes need to help them move to a larger city where they can live a different sort of life that they can't live here.

Changes for boys support girls

We also have to be aware of the needs of the girls in town and to make sure that the changes we're making for boys are going to lead to a great difference for girls, particularly girls in rural Australia. But the difference has to happen across the whole community. Unlike the move for girls' education that happened back in the late 70's and early 80's, that came out of a push from the general community, I think in boys' education, we're really almost ahead of the community. If we're getting flack and if it is a hot potato it's because we're taking up the action on behalf of the kids who we care about and love a great deal.

There's a huge challenge presented to the harm-minimisation programs that we're putting in and that involves drug education but it also involves alcohol abuse. It means driving, it means safety, Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) issues. We train all our kids on the OH&S program. We do back care with all of them, girls and boys. We do what we can to job ready our kids but also to make them as safe as we possibly can in a society that is very high risk taking.

Challenging prevailing attitudes

Attitudes about drinking in particular, and it is the land of the long-neck home bottler where we live, are a real problem. We're really

We're really challenging a lot of very dangerous behaviour.

challenging a lot of very dangerous behaviour and I've got rapped over the knuckles for that in the past. I spoke about it on assembly, just in terms of how much we care for our kids and that young people aren't allowed to drink because they tend to drink to get drunk. While there are some bad examples around they have to learn how to use alcohol wisely and that we were really concerned for them. Binge drinking is such a danger. We're challenging some of the beliefs and long term behaviours of our community, and it's a minefield for a leader.

They do very, very well but they never return.

Lastly there's a huge perceived threat in my community from the educated male. In our community they are happy for their girls to go off to university. Our kids achieve very highly. Last year the top university entrants index was 98.45, the year before it was in the 97's. And persistently we have kids in that area. Our annual report shows it. We have some quite exceptional children, we have some wonderful teaching going on. Our classes are very small. In the high school we have two classes in most years. Year 9/10 we run vertically in all their subjects including Maths, English and Science. The end result of that is that our students do well.

Our senior classes are about six in number. They do very, very well but they never return and that's a fear. Some of our brightest boys are pulled out at Year 10 and put on the farm. They do a rural traineeship where the parents can claim part of the salary for training them but they don't go off to do their training at a college. They don't do accredited courses that would lead to other things in the future, and that's a major concern. So us pushing completing education, and trying to make it the norm to go onto Year 12, is a real issue for our parents. There isn't the employment for professionals in town. We do need a new doctor coming up, our two are getting pretty old now. So I'd be happy to train one of those up. But they really are concerned about that and they don't like to see their boys go. If we're doing a good job the kids stay at the school. If we're not they're wealthy enough to go off to private schools. They also live distant enough to be able to get a large subsidy from the government to go to one of the cheaper private schools. So my numbers are real line-ball as far as how well we're going.

In particular years when we've had problems, we've had two or three boys in a bad peer group sent off to boarding school as punishment. It's a very sad thing for a parent to send a child away when they're in difficulty. So I don't want that to happen to my boys. I want them to be able to live in their community and do as well as they possibly can. But it is a challenge in leadership, when you're really bucking a whole cultural change there and you need to take your school council, your P&C and everyone with you to do that.

Case Study Three

Jenni Griffith

Jenni has spent 17 years as a secondary humanities teacher in rural NSW. She has also worked on Assuarance Teams and as a consultant for the Department of Education. In this case study, Jenni describes a time when she was Principal of an area school with 160 students from Kindergarten to Year 12 in an isolated rural community with a large indigenous population.

Greg Griffith has worked for many years as a support teacher - behaviour. He was the Assistant Principal, Welfare, who developed the teaching units of the program at the school described in this case study. Greg and Jenni worked with the local indigenous community to develop a cultural and social awareness program for a group of Aboriginal boys at the school.

Jenni: The school was in an isolated rural community. The closest town was 200 km away. You didn't travel outside of the town very much. There was very low employment and very few services. In the community there was lots of domestic violence, lots of violence in the streets, lots of very loud name calling, and aggression. It was sad to watch the way people were dealing with each other. The school catered for 160 children from Kindergarten to Year 12.

We'd had a 12 year old boy suicide.

I was the Principal of the school. There were seventeen teaching staff plus about eight support staff. Community members would come in as well. We worked with a lot of interagency people too.

Greg: I was seconded to the school as an Assistant Principal for a welfare program that came as a result of some actions from the school, in recognition of difficulties that they were having with aspects of pupil welfare.

Jenni: We had a situation where we'd had a twelve year old boy suicide. There were suicides occurring among the older men and we were watching that age of suicides come down into the twenties and younger. We were concerned about copy-cat suicides. We were concerned that children were depressed. Some of the boys were particularly depressed and we didn't see many friendship networks. We felt that we needed to address and develop some of those social skills within school.

I started by doing a lot of talking with my colleagues.

The Program

Jenni: The program was multi-faceted. I started by doing a lot of talking with my colleagues, about the fact that we'd need a course and we'd need funding. I employed Greg to come and work in the welfare side. He worked with the Aboriginal community to design social skills units that were suitable for the indigenous community, that covered things that the children would relate to and the community would accept, and would address particular problems. We introduced cultural aspects, and language right across the school. We had cultural camps where our community members would take our children away. At Kindergarten they'd only go for a day whereas seniors went for a couple of days. The program was all-thematic, based not only on the underlying social skills program but also on the cultural aspects.

He worked with the Aboriginal community to design social skills units.

We had cultural camps where our community members would take our children away.

I saw my role as the Principal and as a non-Aboriginal woman, as a facilitator right from the beginning. Our most prominent elder was a female. The women seemed particularly interested in supporting the boys to develop through these issues of youth. So they were quite appreciative of someone wanting to do something, and their ability at talking and working with that side was helpful. I did not attend the boys' sessions. But I found the boys responsive in that they liked working with females, that caring side. A lot of the behaviour issues in school were quelled because I had developed a relationship with those boys and developed a trust there. So maybe it's some of those female qualities that helped in the development of that program.

Basically Greg had an understanding of what the program was about. I attended a lot of the initial meetings because of the interagency work and the liaison aspects. We then briefed each other and we understood what the purpose of the program was and what outcomes we wanted. He fed back aspects of the program as they developed, and I felt he worked very well with both the males and our female Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEA'S). The relationship developed to a stage where he learnt to eat raw goanna!

I saw my role as the principal and as a non-Aboriginal woman as a facilitator.

Greg: First, the social skills area was defined in respect to what the community wanted to do. With my area of working defined in terms of what we wanted to achieve, we were going reasonably well. How we were going to get there, and how we were going to get those skills to our students was a very great learning experience for me, because many of the assumptions that I make when I'm working with white and or middle class students were inappropriate. I had to learn a great deal about the Aboriginal community and how to get those skills over to kids. So it was a good learning experience in terms of how to write programs with different students. It was also a learning experience in working with the Aboriginal community in terms of their expectations of someone from outside and someone who's male.

We didn't attend the camps.

Working with Jen was interesting. It was really pretty easy in lots of ways because we sat together in many of the planning meetings until we worked out where we were going and that was really under Jen's control. I was, at that stage very much an observer and learner as to where we were going, and where the community and the school were going. But then when we had defined that, my role was the writer, separate from Jen. Then I was reporting regularly to her to demonstrate where we were going and to see that we were still on track. With Jen being the Principal, that was appropriate.

Attendance rates on Tuesday afternoons increased dramatically.

Jenni: I think what was amazing too was empowering the community, because we had to maintain the respect for their own knowledge and their ownership of their culture and their own traditional ways and how they wanted to transfer that into their life. I was always very aware that that wasn't my territory. My territory was to facilitate, to provide the resources, to ask but not to do for them nor to influence them, and they certainly were empowered in their own sessions. We didn't attend the sessions with the children. I facilitated, provided resources for them to organise camps. One or two members of staff might have gone on the camp but we didn't organise the agenda for the camp, we didn't go and say we want to do this or do that. The community worked that one out themselves.

Greg: The preparation of the social skills unit was done with the AEAs. They determined the levels of what to do and then when we had prepared the units we took them to the elders so that they had first screening and last screening on what was the direction of each unit. In the short term, attendance rates on Tuesday afternoons increased dramatically and so the kids were coming back to school for the program.

Modeling gender relations

Jenni: I think the boys would have learnt the fact that we worked together in discussions. We talked and related and that was something a lot of our children didn't have skills in, in working together. The children were so often in turmoil and so loud: their emotions would come to the surface so quickly. I think our modeling would've assisted that. They got to know Greg and got to trust him in the classroom and to see a male role model working on their social skills. They saw me as a female principal, though they were used to me. I don't know whether they'd realised that we were even married. But they would have just seen the same relationship as other staff working in the school.

Greg: I would hope that they would have been able to see people working together without necessarily authority over, but authority together. And if they gained one thing from our working together, or seeing us working together I would hope they would have not seen the need for domination by either party. We could work together as peers.

Part Four

Specialist Programs – to reach all the boys

Part Four highlights the links between the social and emotional development of boys, and their academic achievement. The case studies in this section illustrate how a positive male identity enhances the self-esteem of boys and can lead to increased academic achievement.

The section includes a case study from a child-care setting. Childcare workers have responsibility for children from a very young age, and as such have a role with boys when they are first forming their gender identities. Children as young as two have a strong sense of gender identity, but have not yet developed firm understandings of the behaviours this identity might encompass. They are also developing their sense of self- esteem at this early age.

Mardi Droll describes working with a boy whose family did not give him many positive messages about himself. The workers at her centre worked to develop the self-esteem of one boy by giving him lots of hugs and verbal encouragement. They also gave him particular responsibilities to make him feel special and important. Mardi describes how the child-care workers modelled positive attitudes towards boys, for the families, while at the same time, dealing with negative behaviours of the boys.

Mardi suggests that boys are more likely than girls to express low self-esteem with aggressive physical behaviour. Many workers find this physical expression of emotions difficult to manage. In her centre, the boys are presented with plenty of physical activities, space to move around, and equipment they can hit and punch. The workers plan for the boys' physical needs, while guiding them towards appropriate expression of emotions.

Mardi reflects on the low numbers of men in the childcare profession and the fears, that some parents have, of employing men. She suggests that if these attitudes to men in child-care changed, and more men were employed, it would improve the situation for the boys.

Most of the students who end up in behaviour management or school welfare programs are boys. Community programs that cater for students with behavioural, social and academic needs often need to cater for large numbers of boys. Increasingly, programs are recognising that the gender identities of these boys are linked to their self-esteem.

The Homelink program, that supports boys at risk in schools through community volunteers, has recently begun to address this issue. Maureen Owens reflects on her role as a woman co-ordinator of the program in recruiting and supporting male volunteers to work with the students in need. Anjula Mapperson, a mother of a boy in the program, discusses how her relationship with her son became more respectful and fun when he was given positive support by a male volunteer.

Janet Markey and Barry McCartney also work with boys identified as being at risk. Janet describes her role as advocate for the program with principals of schools, while Barry has the more 'hands-on' tasks of building the boys' self-esteem through personal relationships and support, both inside and outside the classroom. They discuss the importance of understanding the situation that the boys come from and working with the boys in non-threatening, active ways. They also stress the importance of modelling successful relationships between men and women with boys who may not have this in their family circumstances.

This case study and the one on Homelink, stress the role women workers can have in identifying suitable male supports for boys who are in trouble, and in creating 'male-friendly' welfare programs.

Suzanne Eastwood and Michael Flood work as community educators on the issue of domestic violence. They describe their program and their working processes when they visit high schools to run short sessions for students on domestic violence.

There are differences in responses to the issue of violence between the boys and the girls. Suzanne and Michael discuss how being positive about the boys is an important tool for helping boys discuss and understand this issue. Suzanne describes the ways that she is able to give boys important information about how girls feel about and experience these issues.

The case study illustrates how women and men working as a team can model equitable and playful relationships between women and men. It highlights the importance of both men and women raising difficult gender issues with boys.

The studies in this section illustrate the need to work with boys, particularly boys at risk, on their social and emotional needs. Boys who are in trouble often have low self-esteem. Boys with low self-esteem have little chance of academic success. Women child-care workers, teachers and leaders can support boys at risk to develop self-esteem by being positive about boys. Women and men can work together on the social and emotional needs of boys, by recognising that boys are developing their masculine identities as part of their self-esteem.

Case Study One

Mardi Droll

Mardi Droll is Director of the Mt Druitt Occasional Childcare Service, a community based service catering for children six weeks to school age. Within this context she cares for boys from babies to age five or six. She often witnesses the development of a child through this period and older when they come back to visit after they start school.

The children's attendance patterns at the centre vary depending upon the needs of the family. There is an hourly fee as well as the daily one. So a child may attend for an hour on one week or thirty hours the next and then we mightn't see him for a month. But the majority of children are fairly regular. They all come on the same day or days each week except when they're sick or something unforeseen happens.

Some days we have all boys. That happens now and again. Overall, we have more boys that come on a regular basis. That would fluctuate from month to month and from year to year.

As boys reach three and over, most seek acceptance by playing games that help give them a sense of power and control over their lives.

Boys Activities

In my experience boys generally prefer to express themselves physically, enjoy themselves physically and solve their problems physically. That's an over generalisation, I know. But I find that as boys reach three and over most seek acceptance by playing games that help them to give them a sense of power and control over their lives. While girls engage in more 'life experience' type dramatic play to make sense of their world, boys tend to play out fantasy and hero worship type play to gain some control over their lives.

The boys love dinosaurs. Girls hardly ever play with them but when they're out, the boys will play with them all day non-stop and they'll carry them with them wherever they go. They'll be in the sandpit, they'll be on the bikes, they'll be with them where ever they are. And they make the sound effects with them and build things around them. It's something very few girls play with, but the boys all play with them. They just love them.

The boys can see me as a 'grandma figure and they take on a caring sort of role with me.

They love the sandpit. But they play with it in terms of 'How far can I dig?' and 'How big a hole can I make?' So they are very into gross motor activity in the sandpit, whereas the girls will pour more, and engage in more dramatic play. The boys love anything they can ride, climb or build and knock down.

They love stories, but they have to be interesting to them. They like them especially if there's visual props like puppets or feltboard pieces. I find it very useful to use the children's names in stories, especially if they're a bit restless. I can tell 'The Three Little Pigs' all day every day, six times a day and the kids would love it, they're always asking me to tell the same old story. And the boys always want to be the wolf when we re-enact the story.

Boys, especially big boys, need space. They need to be able to run and chase each other and that sort of thing. They need to be outside a lot. When boys have become a bit too aggressive, I have hung mattresses from trees for them to have a punch at and kick at so that they're not kicking each other. I think they need to take out the energy they seem to accumulate on something in an appropriate way. I think it's harder on boys if they're stuck inside, if the weather is bad, or whatever. They love anything that involves physical contact, any sort of rough and tumble play and tickle games. And they love to sit on your lap.

A woman director

I think the advantage of having me, an older female, as director of the centre, is that the boys can see me as a 'grandma' figure. And they take on a caring sort of role with me. I've been asked more than once by a child when I'm going to go into a retirement home, but it's in a caring way. I think too because I am older, they don't see me as a replacement for their mother and so I really have very few problems with them complying with what we want them to do. They just seem to easily be able to accept what I say to them, which often really annoys the mothers when they come in. But I suppose they have developed a respect, maybe because I'm older.

I guess the advantage of being a female is that they aren't afraid to come and give me a cuddle and sometimes they just need that. They just need to be able to come and stand beside me, put their arm around me for two seconds, then off they'll go again. They know that I don't mind rough and tumble type play. Like this afternoon, I was bending over and I got two squeezes, three pinches and four tickles on the bottom because I happened to be bending over. That's okay, they'll come up and give me a sort of elbow in the ribs and stuff like that in a playful way. They love that, they'll then run away and giggle and they think that's great fun.

I think there would be great advantages for them to have a male director too. I think a lot of boys need some male role models around them but I guess that's not going to happen in this situation because every time I've tried to employ a male, I've just gotten so much complaint from parents. The last time I had a male volunteer, he was lovely with the kids, but the parents just didn't feel comfortable about him being here even though this is a really open centre. We can see everything from everywhere in this centre. It's a very simple design and I mean I can see the whole centre from my office if I want to. So it's not that there's a problem in supervision or anything like that. I think they were just generally nervous. I think it was a scare thing. Because I got comments like, 'Oh you're not going to let him change my child's nappy are you?' Or 'You're not going to let him take my child to the toilet are you?' So there's obviously that fear even though we're all able to see what each other is doing all the time. But you see more men in long daycare settings and preschool settings now. I think things will probably get better, as people are starting to see the advantages of men in childcare.

We have more males coming to bring their children and pick them up now than we ever have, which is a positive thing. We have lots of grandparents pick up kids and drop them off and that includes grandfathers. There're some afternoons when there's three or four men standing around collecting their children and that's a positive thing. At least men feel as if they can come into a childcare situation now and pick up their children. So if that's the case then I guess it's going to be easier eventually to employ males even in this situation.

Case Study

My favourite story is about a boy who I'll call Josh, who came to us when he was three.

Josh had developed cognitively really well. He had a good vocabulary, but he only chose to use one word and that word was very unacceptable. It started with 'F'. And so he'd climb to the top of the climbing frame and swear at anyone who came in the gate. He

The first thing I did when he walked in the door was to give him a hug.

wouldn't let anyone come near him. His social behaviour was really poor with the other children or anybody else for that matter. He obviously had really low self-esteem. And it became a real problem because he was not only offending everybody that came in the gate but he was teaching the other children some terrible language.

One of the issues was communication with his family. Various members of the family would drop him off. His siblings were a lot older than him. He had teenage and young adult siblings. And sometimes they'd bring him, sometimes his dad would bring him, or sometimes an aunt or an uncle would bring him. And so the consistency as far as contact with us was a bit sketchy at first.

No matter who dropped him off, it was like he was a piece of baggage. They dropped him off and said 'Here have him.' And they'd always say to him 'Now don't swear.' And then the first thing that would be said to him when he got picked up was 'How many times did you swear?' So obviously the expectation to swear was well and truly implanted in him. His arrival and departure was always very quick and there wasn't a lot of expressed interest in his day and what he had achieved during the day. His family members often referred to him as 'it' rather than him, and his mum just didn't seem to be able to cope with him.

So he was quite a problem. We needed to encourage him to use other language. We needed to do something about his social skills. Emotionally he obviously had poor self-esteem and it was very difficult. He wouldn't comply with anything that was asked of him. He was quite aggressive and quite wild and quite difficult to handle. So my staff and I sat down and we said, 'Okay, what are we going to do with him?'

The first thing I did whenever he walked in the door before anybody could say anything, was to give him a hug. I'd gradually got closer to him and eventually I was able to give him a hug and say to him 'We're going to have the best day today.' And I carried on in that vain while the parents were there and I'd say 'Oh I'm really looking forward to this, we're going to do blah, blah, blah.' I'd try to say everything positive when he first arrived.

Then we'd ask him to help. We'd call him our special helper and encourage him to do things that were special. So that way we tried to elevate his self-esteem. And his language improved. Then when it came time for him to be picked up, before anybody could say anything I'd bring out the art work and whatever else he'd done and

I'd tell everybody what a wonderful helper he'd been and he helped me do this, and we did this together. And if they mentioned swearing I'd say 'Oh, Josh doesn't do that!'

I'd tell everybody what a wonderful helper he'd been.

Eventually we got to the point, it took about twelve months I guess, where his family would actually take an interest in what he did and they would be quite positive when he came. He ended up being extremely gentle with the girls actually, and there were lots of qualities hidden there.

He only came a few hours a week, once a week, so he had to re-learn some of that stuff every time he came. But eventually when he went to leave us to go to school his mum actually said to me 'I can't believe the difference in this child and it's a pleasure to have him at home now.' I felt really as if we had contributed to that and I often say to my students, 'Look it doesn't matter if you feel as if you can't make a difference in a short time, because sometimes you can.'

Boys demonstrate their emotions physically.

Modeling being positive

I think the difference was that we were able to role model some appropriate responses to him in front of his family so that they could pick up on that. I think this started to happen at home and that was probably more effective than anything else we did, except that I do feel that his self-esteem was a lot better when he left.

Boys' behaviours

And let's face it, it's often more frustrating to cope with boys that have problems than with girls, because the boys demonstrate their emotions physically. I think we can cope with girls whining and being temperamental and that sort of stuff, which they tend to do more of, because it's not quite as much in our face as boys are. And sometimes I think we exacerbate problems with boys because we tend to think 'Oh god, he's here again.' And they come in with us having that expectation. I'm a great believer in expectations. I really believe that if you expect something from a child, that's what you'll get. And I firmly believe that the expectation of his family that he was going to be a handful was half the reason why he was. But later on when their expectation changed, then he changed a lot.

Being positive with boys

Boys are more likely to react to low self-esteem. Girls might misbehave and sulk but boys will be more physically aggressive on the whole and the reaction to that is probably much more negative than it is to girls. That probably just makes their self-esteem worse. We always seem to be saying 'No' more to boys, 'Don't' more to boys. We need to really start saying 'Do' and 'Yeah, that's okay.' We don't tend to talk to them at length, give them the reasons, tell them why things are appropriate or inappropriate, as much as we do to girls. They don't want to listen either as much as girls do. They want to get on with it, they don't want to stand there while you give them an explanation, where girls will do that more. We don't take into account that they need to know the reasons why too. Even though they mightn't want to listen, they need to hear it. They need their self-esteem bolstered.

Case Study One

Maureen Owens

Maureen Owens was the coordinator of a Homelink Program that operates in an area that includes several large coastal and semi-rural/industrial towns with a mix of socio-economic groups. HOMELINK is a community- based student support program. It offers a trained volunteer to support a school child who is experiencing stress or difficulty. The program provides a link between families, schools and communities as well as providing practical caring assistance to students. Maureen reflects on her role as a woman co-ordinator of the program in recruiting and supporting male volunteers to work with the students in need.

Anjula Mapperson was born in Fiji. She is the mother of an eleven year old boy, Joel, who is in the HOMELINK program. She also has twin daughters who are 17 months old. She reflects on the changes in her relationship with her son since he has been involved in HOMELINK

Maureen Owens

I co-ordinate the Homelink program in eleven schools - eight primary schools and three high schools. Coordinating the program means recruiting, training and supporting volunteers. We have a ten week training course, held one day a week, to inform them about the issues they may encounter in their volunteering role.

The volunteers are then linked to a child at school. School teachers and counsellors refer students to the program. Both student and volunteer are matched by a variety of criteria before being linked. I also liaise with other agencies. The Department Of Community Services also refer children to us.

The volunteers, the children on the program, their families and the staff working with them in schools, all need support and feedback.

The schools and agencies sometimes require written reports. But with parents, it's a lot more low-key - a cuppa and a chat. We try to be more like a friend, not like other interventions in their lives that may be unwelcome. They gain trust and often open up and tell us what's really going on in their lives and how difficult it sometimes is. The volunteers are special friends to the child, someone to talk to or play with, or they just listen. The volunteers usually visit their student once a week, either at the school or at home. It depends on the circumstances of each child.

Boys' behaviours are more likely to come to the attention of the teachers.

The Program

The program is aimed mainly at the student at school. The volunteer works directly with the student. But we take a holistic approach - we try to support and strengthen the whole family and the student. We want to build up the networks in their community, for the family and the student, so they are not so vulnerable. We want the whole family to become stronger so they can help their child see his or her self-worth.

In primary schools, most of the referrals come from Years 2, 4 and 6 and in high schools, it's Year 7. The majority of the referrals are boys - about 75%. Girls are referred too, but I think boys' behaviours are more likely to come to the attention of the teacher.

That's why we realised we needed more men volunteers, as there are so many boys on the program with few male role models in their lives. So our campaign was to recruit more. Now we have about 34 active volunteers, 24 women and 10 men.

Women and Men Volunteers

Women and men sometimes have different motivations for volunteering. I find women volunteers often have been helped themselves before, and they say 'My child was helped and now I want to give back..' For the men, some of them are in their middle years and have been made redundant or retrenched, or they want to try a change in career. The skills that they have gained in the workplace, or in their profession, are very useful as a volunteer. They often do more practical projects with the boys like building or fixing a bike. Some of the men can work flexible hours, especially if they have a home business, so they can fit volunteering into their working day. Some of our volunteers have been involved in sport through their own children and therefore have experience organising activities.

Both the men and the women volunteers sometimes have a difficult time with some boys on the program, especially those entering high school. The boys at this age are often confused as to what's happening in their lives. They may see themselves as worthless, and find it hard to move forward even though they have the potential. They often get into power struggles.

Supporting the volunteers is paramount for me. Some volunteers need to be reminded that they are doing a good job and that the boys really do appreciate them. They don't get a lot of feedback from the boys, because it's not cool to show emotion or affection. If the volunteer can't come one week, the next week the boy might say accusingly, 'Where were you last week?' Rather than being able to say 'I really missed you.'

Some volunteers need to be reminded that they are doing a good job and that the boys really do appreciate them.

The volunteers work with some boys who put themselves down at times, acting the class clown, rejecting and challenging everything that happens at school. They have to be boosting the boys' self-esteem all the time. It's hard work. The volunteers know that they can ring me to talk it through if they've had a difficult time with a child.

Co-ordinating the program is a big job but it's very rewarding. To know that a student has had the opportunity for growth through being linked with a volunteer makes it worthwhile.

Anjula Mapperson

Being a single mum, I have tried everything for Joel. He went to a special school. That really didn't do him much good at all. He wasn't a really good kid at school at all. So I talked to teachers, talked to the principal and they suggested to me that HOMELINK might do him good. HOMELINK gave him someone to share his problems with, who can see him on a regular basis. It might get it out what is wrong with him, why he was doing what he was doing. I just thought that Joel needed somebody besides me and my friends to talk about his problems. They do things together. Most times I can't do things with him because of the babies. I've got twin girls. They are seventeen months. Joel is my oldest.

Ken (the HOMELINK volunteer) seeing Joel has made a big difference. He looks forward to Friday, Ken coming and playing cards. I try my best to spend a little bit of time with him when the girls are asleep but most of the time I have cleaning up to do. Ken plays games, cards, goes for bike rides, things that I can't do without a car. Sometimes they go to Ken's house and he finds it pretty good going there. He has made a lot of changes in him.

He listens more to me now than before.

He's just different. He was so much trouble. He listens more to me now than before. Before he was having trouble with his behaviour, his attitude, his temper. He didn't want to do anything with me. He would say, 'I am always at home with you', 'cause having brand new babies in the house you can't get out.

Joel is a really good reader. He always loves stories, he would write stories when he was in Kindergarten. He loves reading. He has quite a lot of books. Ken reads to him too.

I really believe that Joel and I needed a break.

Every Friday he tells me 'Ah Mum, Ken will be here soon. I am going to go out soon.' He gets all his stuff packed up to go to the pool. And he is really proud of the fact that he can swim now. He loves swimming. A lot of times I can't take him, with two babies in one pool and I have got to watch him and the twins.

And he would come home and would have had such a good time. Every time he has gone out with Ken, he comes home and just talks and talks about what they did, how they did it. 'Ken's got a bike' - he was just going on and on about that.

I really believe that Joel and I needed a break. I needed the break from him and he needed the break from me. Because a lot of times we didn't get along. He used to get cranky and I used to get cranky with him, I would put him in his room, he used to say 'Make me', and that gets me going, and he just has a really bad temper you know.

Things are a lot easier between us again. He was jealous too, when the twins were born. For the first time then he couldn't understand why I couldn't spend much time with him and he loves going out doing things. We go to the movies sometimes, and we go to a lot of other places. Like for his birthday I paid someone to look after the twins. I spent the whole day with him, we went out for lunch, the club and the movies, and he loved that. But you see he has been the only child for so long and it was sort of a shock to his system too. He thought, 'Lets play up for mummy', but he is taking it pretty good now. He loves his sisters.

I think the HOMELINK is helping and Ken working with him has made a lot of difference. He helps me a lot now, like helps me around the house so I can do something with him while the girls are asleep. He is really happy.

Case Study Two

Suzanne Eastwood & Michael Flood

Suzanne Eastwood and Michael Flood are educators with many years' experience in domestic violence and youth work. They currently work for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in the ACT.

In this case study, they describe their program and their working processes when they visit high schools to run short sessions for students on domestic violence. They discuss the differences in responses to the issue of violence between the boys and the girls.

Michael: We work for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in the ACT, and go into schools as outside educators. Typically we're doing one-off sessions with groups of young men and women and typically they're mixed sex classes. Sometimes we separate the boys and girls and I work with the boys and Suzanne works with the girls. We're experimented with other kinds of formats as well. In fact we've got an interest in doing longer and multiple sessions with classes but typically that's difficult because of the constraints which schools themselves are under.

Suzanne: We know that sometimes young women's groups work better when it's just a single sex group and sometimes it's the same with the boys. But we don't have a hard and fast decision-making process about it, and we really decide on the needs of the group. Sometimes groups are working really well, and we don't separate. Michael and I will stay together in the room. But if we feel like it would benefit the process to separate, we always have another space that we can have access to.

I've noticed, working with young women, that I might have twenty-five exercises or different activities that I can do, and sometimes in a two hour session I've done every single one of them and it's still ten minutes until the end of the two hours. The young women have no difficulty talking about the subject. One of the features is that women

Boys and girls seem to be in quite different places in relation to sex, relationships and violence.

'get' the issues about domestic violence, about the story about domestic violence, about looking at the prevention of domestic violence. We also have quite a heavy emphasis on just talking about relationships as well. We look at what are positive aspects of relationships and what are negative aspects, and then get them to talk about what they've heard about it, what their experiences of positive and negative parts of relationships are. Then we can take them to the next step about domestic violence. 'What do you think domestic violence is in the context of this?' Then we also talk about the early warning signs of abusive behaviours in a relationship, and identify things like extreme jealousy, controlling behaviour. We ask, 'How many negative things do you think that people are prepared to put up with before they walk away from a relationship?' We try and get young women to identify, 'How important is a boyfriend? How difficult is it to walk away and not have a boyfriend?' or 'What have you heard that people have put up with from young men that you know?'

I have never really had a problem with the behaviour of young women in the group. They really want to talk about these issues. One thing to keep in mind is that we don't ask for personal disclosures. I'm not asking anyone to tell their personal story. We're not encouraging people to speak from their own experience so that depersonalises it, so that people can really say what they want to say without everyone thinking that's their family or their experience. We actively discourage personal disclosure in the class and if we think that anyone is going to do that then we'll often try and stop it if we can. And we always do things like put the 24 hour phone numbers up on the board, talk about what resources are available if you want to talk about something more personally, and that we're around after the class and we're in the school.

Michael: It is very different for the boys. One of the things we notice routinely, and something that's supported by the literature too, is that boys and girls seem to be in quite different places in relation to sex, relationships and violence. For example, when I ask boys about positives about relationships, very often they'll shout out things like 'Big tits' or 'Sex', or things like that. They will focus on sex and getting sex and on girl's bodies. This is a really important part of the group talk that boys will do about relationships. And there's a whole lot of joking and banter and name-calling and teasing which boys will engage when in a group, talking about issues like relationships and sexuality.

What we're being presented with here is boy's culture. It's really the character of boy's culture and masculine culture, which presents some challenges in doing work on relationships and violence. Often there's a quite substantial gap between that kind of talk they do and their actual individual relationships and experiences with girls which are often much more vulnerable and anxious and messy. So boys' banter about relationships and sex can mean that we don't actually get to hear what's going on in their individual lives. At the same time I can actually work with that kind of jokey talk they do. So their banter about sex is also a resource to talk to them about relationships and sexuality.

Boys experience of violence

Male to male violence seems to be a really routine part of their lives

Another issue is about violence. Boys tell lots of stories about male to male violence. Male to male violence seems to be a really routine part of their lives. Again that's borne out by the literature. Boys will defend that violence. Boys will say that violence between boys is legitimate and fair and in fact entertaining and exciting. And so we start off by talking about violence in general, then I'll try to shift from that to looking at violence between boys and girls and try to work with these different understandings. While they support violence between boys, they'll also condemn violence against girls. They'll say, 'Guys shouldn't hit chicks.' I try to work with that kind of idea and look at what's positive and what's potentially problematic about that idea too. There are plenty of exceptions, but boys and girls do seem to be in quite different places in relation to the kinds of issues we work on, relationships and violence. And so splitting the classes can be quite a useful process in terms of dealing with their different concerns.

Our experience is that boys will do less disagreeing with each other than girls will. It's harder for individual boys to speak up when what they want to say goes against the norms among the boys in that class. Just to give one example, I was in a class a couple of months ago and we were talking about girls and relationships and several guys in that class were routinely using words like 'Whore' and 'Bitch' to describe girls. One guy in the class said, 'Look why are you calling girls bitches, that's offensive.' The guy on one side of this guy said, 'Mate what have you got between you legs?' And the guy on the other side said, 'Are you a lesbian?' You get this kind of policing of boy's behaviour. Our impression is that this kind of surveillance of each other is stronger among boys than it is among girls. We also think that, given proper time with a particular group of boys, that banter breaks down to some degree and you get different kinds of talk. But that's certainly been an issue so far in the kind of student participation we get. And also just in terms of classroom management. The boys will muck up and disrupt for each others' benefit and that too can make it difficult to do the kinds of exercises we're exploring.

There are also real advantages to splitting boys and girls, for girls but also for boys. Boys are also more likely to say certain sorts of things when they're out of girls' company. I mean they're more likely to talk in a way they do talk with other guys. It shows me really clearly that they do desire to have good sexual and personal relations with girls no matter how awkwardly or bluntly they're going about that. It's really interesting to see boys, at one point in the class, just telling stories for the sake of other boys about how they did this with some particular girl, then later on, for them to be agreeing that it's 'Macho bullshit', to use the phrase that one boy used. One boy was saying we all boast, we all exaggerate and he and other boys in this class were able to actually look critically at the way they talk with other boys. I'm sure back in their normal lives they will continue to do that to some degree. But they were able to look at how that might hinder their actual attempts to have relations with girls. They discussed how this kind of talk means that they set themselves up for unrealistic models of relationships and that talking more realistically and personally will actually be to their advantage as well as being more honest.

Suzanne: It's one of those things that happens very rarely for young men, that they do talk realistically and critically about themselves with a really good facilitated discussion, where they feel safe to be able to expose those parts of themselves that they might not normally do.

Results of the program

Michael: From the evaluations we did in 1996 and 1998 with the students we'd worked with in high schools, the vast majority, typically around 95- 96% could identify that they'd learnt particularly useful things about relationships. They felt that they were more able to identify violence in relationships, they were more able to identify the positives and negatives of relationships. They felt clearer about the idea that violence was unacceptable, they had a better idea of what they could do if they were faced with a situation of domestic violence and how they could help others who were in a situation of domestic or personal violence. The evaluations kept showing that they'd learnt these quite concrete things and that their anti-violent attitudes had either been encouraged or confirmed.

Suzanne: What you often notice from the written evaluation from boys is a lot less words. But the girls will tend to write one or two sentences where as boys will tend to write - Boring shit!

Michael: Or other positive words - Good, or interesting.
I've noticed that boys and girls alike really appreciate having outside

educators come in and treat them as peers and as people with interesting and valuable experiences. They really appreciate being listened to and having conversations which are real. They like talking about sex in relationships in a kind of down to earth and honest and playful way rather than the sort of sometimes moralistic or even kind of anti-sex, anti-relationships kind of emphasis they sometimes get from other sources. The lessons seem to becomes a topic of conversation among boys and girls themselves, which I find really encouraging because ultimately, what we want to do, is to have some influence on peer culture and on boys' and girls' lives in school and outside school, not just in an individual class.

We're quite flexible about the ways we'll organise the class. So we'll start with the both of us in front of a class introducing ourselves and introducing what we're interested in doing. But then we will very much go with the concerns which the boys and girls raise themselves to do with relationships and to do with violence. So we're still on the subject area, but we go with the particular needs of that group of students. And so we'll decide there and then whether we're going to split the class at any point. We very much work in partnership and bounce off each other and take turns. What one person does in one lesson the other person might do in the next lesson.

Suzanne: It's not that we often talk about it. We decided to be flexible and to be supportive of each other. How I would tend to answer an issue that came up would be different from how Michael would, but it wouldn't be contradictory either.

Michael: It's really useful when one person is running a particular process or facilitating some kind of exercise for the other facilitator to be sitting back and thinking okay, maybe we could try this now.

Suzanne: We're not in competition with each other. We do have supportive attitudes towards each other. We've got a really strong theoretical basis for what we do and I think that is obvious in the class situation.

Michael: The boys and the girls just see a man and a woman working in partnership and they see us working together in this egalitarian and respectful and playful way. We joke with each other and joke with the students themselves. So they see this example of a pretty healthy working relationship. The other thing they see is that women and men can work together and can share an interest in issues such as violence and sexism and gender and equality. They see also that issues like violence are not simply 'Women's Issues', that they're issues which are of concern to everybody.

It's important that men and women stand together on these issues.

Suzanne: That's a practice that we have really tried, at Domestic Violence Crisis Service, to work on. We began in 1993 when Michael was a volunteer with Men Against Sexual Assault. When those men came into the schools with us as volunteers, we built really strong respectful relationship between men and women, which have been maintained on the issue of domestic violence. It's important that men and women stand together on those issues and be seen to do that.

Michael: There are real advantages for boyswork, for men to work in alliance with women or in partnership with women, whether they do that directly in the classroom as we do, or whether they consult with or work with or learn from others in the field. I think if we don't do that, then we risk reinventing the wheel. But we can also risk reproducing some of the dodgy bits of masculinity that we're trying to undo, if we're not actually aware of some of that broader context for the work.

Suzanne: Some of the feelings that I have about working with men and women together also come from my past life when I was a youth worker, working with a lot of unemployed young men and two female youth workers and one male youth worker. I realised that these young men, from fourteen to twenty six, had not had relationships with women who weren't their mother or a girl they were trying to chat up.

Michael: We can see that there are powerful advantages to women's involvement in boyswork both for the content of the work and for boys themselves.

Suzanne: Our experience would clearly be that there's actually a lot more than one group of boys. Teachers will often tell you that, not only could we divide the class into male / female, but you could also divide into groups of boys and their particular roles in the school.

Michael: We're increasingly interested in the idea of actually working with groups who are chosen by their different relationships to violence or the different positions among groups of boys. So we'd work specifically with boys who espouse that kind of violent, dominant, masculinity, and with boys who resist that and are critical of that. But we haven't thought too much about how we'd actually organise that with a school and of course there'd be practical difficulties in doing so.

Suzanne: On the Men's Issues Reference Group that we've had here, what has come up is if we have limited resources then what's the best use of resources, what is the most effective work? Is it work with boys who do have a very strong association with violence or violence-supportive attitudes? Or is it better to spend two hours with boys who don't have those attitudes so strongly and where you may get more change for limited resources?

..encourage boys to find examples in their own lives of practicing non-violence.

Michael: I've seen popular boys who can use the safety of their popularity to not go along with some norms of masculinity at their school. They could actually be quite effective peer leaders in encouraging non-violent relations with girls, respectful relations with girls, and with other boys. But I've also seen more the sort of stereotype of boys who, within the safety of a class, with a facilitator present, are able to say, 'Violence is wrong' or, 'Boys shouldn't be beating each other up.' But they're less likely to affect other boys' attitudes, because they are more often the victims of that violence themselves and that's why they're speaking up. You get popular boys and 'Victim' boys espousing ethics of non-violence. And whenever we hear that, that's a really important thing. One of the most important strategies I try to use in schools is to encourage boys to find examples in their own lives of practicing non-violence and living in respectful and healthy ways. They need to build on those experiences, to build on those stories and to find support for those in their communities, among their friends and in their family and personal histories, to look at what can encourage these sort of different ways of being. So it's very much about building on the already existing resources in boys' lives for non-violence. We listen to the realities of boys' and girls' lives and try to build on the positives in those lives, and we continue to be really clear that things like violence and sexual violence are unacceptable and also to be critical of the things we see as dangerous or unhealthy in boys' and girls' lives.

We try to look for the positives in boys' lives and to build on those positives.

Principles of domestic violence work with boys

Michael: There are two key principles which guide our work. One of them is to be what some people call male-positive or to be oriented towards enhancing boys' and men's lives. We try to avoid a kind of 'Boys are all horrible' or 'Men are all bad' approach and we try to look for the positives in boys' lives and to build on those positives.

The second principle is to be gender-just or pro-feminist. We are not uncritical about boys' lives and about boys' culture but aware of questions of sexism and power. We challenge those aspects of boys' culture which are about sexism and about power over others. So those two stances balance and inform each other.

We challenge those aspects of boys' culture which are about sexism and about power over others.

The boys are so curious about young women and relationships.

Suzanne: We acknowledge that boys are struggling with really difficult behaviour. Ninety percent of victims and perpetrators of violence are actually young men or men. They're their own victims. So that there has to be some acknowledgment that boys are actually struggling with that type of behaviour or that type of culture. I think not acknowledging that is doing a real disservice to them. One of the reasons that we don't have challenges with each other is because we do have a fairly common philosophy that we've developed over a long time independently.

Michael: It's interesting being a man working with boys, because I've grown up knowing that playful, masculine banter which males do with each other where you take the piss out of each other and you muck around a bit and you laugh and it's a kind of bonding. I've sometimes used that sort of playful, jokey style. But I also know that that kind of style can be a real way of reinforcing hierarchies among males and a way of insulating myself and others from actually thinking personally and reflectively about an issue. It can kind of be a way of dismissing an issue. So I feel quite ambivalent about the kind of masculine resources I've grown up which I could use with boys, because I think the danger is indulging in a kind of uncritical, matey bonding with boys. And I don't think that's quite what I want to do, because I am interested in shifting some aspects of boys' culture including their support for violence among boys and for violence towards girls. And I'm also very conscious that boys themselves will perceive me to be violating the norms of masculinity because I'm criticising aspects of masculinity and taking a stand against violence. They'll question my masculinity. Boys will assume men who do that are gay of course. That's a common response.

Suzanne: There is a lot of value in Michael facilitating the young women's group and me facilitating a boy's group. It's good to offer that opportunity for young men to have a bit of an insight into girls' culture, to talk to them about the sort of things that young women are saying. I'll often say things to them like, 'Well young women are saying that they're more likely to have sex with a guy if they think he won't tell everyone about it.' Most guys are actually desperate to know about young women. They are so curious about young women or relationships and they really don't have many opportunities to discuss these issues in a safe and supportive environment at school or anywhere else for that matter. If we split the group - we always try to come back together - because girls really want to know what guys think about relationships and guys want to know what girls think too. We will facilitate that discussion at the end of the group. It is often the most interesting discussion. Young people will often say things like, 'We don't get the chance to talk like this.'

Case Study Three

Janet Markey & Barry McCartney

Janet Markey has spent 20 years as an Educator in Primary, Secondary and tertiary education. In 1999, she established JM & Associates, a team of education consultants. She provides consultancy to schools and businesses as well as providing professional development programs on a range of topics from understanding and working with boys to team building and change management.

Barry McCartney has been employed by several Gold Coast Primary Schools (QLD) as a Behaviour Management Consultant, developing and implementing the 'Boys Belong Program'. Barry has worked from Labrador State Primary School since 1997.

Janet: I was working as a Behaviour Management Advisor, and all the people who did that job were females. In order to put in a program that I had developed I needed a male. And so the male that I now work with in that program was brought onboard by me, purposely to work in that program.

Through my reading and my years of working, I came up with some key elements that I thought would be necessary in order for boys to look at themselves and to change their behaviour. And I needed a man to do that because as much as I would try to relate to these boys, whatever we were trying to get across to them would be far more powerful going via someone whom they could identify as male.

I don't know whether I was really quite sure what sort of male I wanted when I was looking. But when I met Barry I knew he would be perfect for this role. He didn't have to be a stereotypical man with big muscles or a famous footballer, but someone who was definitely a man and had a nature that could allow you to talk. That's how Barry is, and the boys pick up on that. When I met Barry I didn't know that he owned a Harley Davidson bike and I didn't know that he'd been camping and been sailing so it was just fortunate that he does all those very boy things. It was just his comfort with himself I think. I push him out of his comfort zone quite a lot and he doesn't like that but it's his own comfort with himself that the boys like.

It's his own comfort with himself that the boys like.

Barry: I came out of welfare, working with children ten to fifteen years of age, in care in a housing situation, trying to keep them in schools. That was very difficult work but obviously something worked. And from there I ended up in the schools, but I basically brought the program that I was doing there to the schools.

The reason I am in schools is that I was approached by Janet. She knew what I did and she said. 'Look, I am a behaviour management person in schools and I am a female and there are plenty of us and we are all females. We know how to go through the theory and the procedures but the boys aren't listening I guess.' That's the shortened version. She believed that a male would have much more impact and when he spoke to these boys the boys might actually listen to an adult male. She needed someone with certain qualities and found me, so I was more than happy to join in with Janet.

Janet was able to secure Labrador School to try this and it was successful from day one. Our relationship was successful, very successful. I got a little frustrated occasionally, but I was quite happy with the relationship.

I would be doing the work and she was doing the setting up, as she had all the schools. In schools, there are certain procedures and protocol that need to be followed. She had all that and she also had the information about behaviour management and teachers and classes and stuff like that.

The Program supporting Boys' identity

Janet: The program operates with Barry working in the classroom with the boys and he'll do one on one as well. So he'll operate as a teacher in the classroom situation, then he does an extra session with them once a week, when they go over and they see him for woodwork. That's very much a one on one, and they do a lot of chatting.

Barry: The program has got a structure. I take five boys over a term. Any more would be difficult to work with. I try to get five from different classes. That way I can actually be in five classes and the program is more widespread across the school, than just working with the individual boy. It's working with other students in class, including the girls as well. It also lets the teacher see how and what I do. Sometimes that rubs off and sometimes it doesn't. It is a lot of role modeling, being an adult male. That's a big part of the success of the program. I use my first name Barry, there is no authority and it is really forming relationships. It's very powerful.

The whole program is based on boys and boys' identity and how they feel about themselves, how they are developing or where they are going. The families of most boys I work with from this school, which is a high-need school, are very dysfunctional. There are multi-dads or stepdads or partners or whatever you want to name them. Lots of half brothers and sisters or stepbrothers and sisters. The only common factor is probably their mother. It seems to be that the older boys have the same problems and it runs through the whole family.

Some counsellors or psychologists might look at the family structure, the past, deaths, split ups, marriage split ups, breakdowns, all those sorts of issues. For me, working with these boys, that is relevant because that does impact on who they are and how they function. But they don't need to work with any of that. The one thing the boys ask of me, not necessarily verbally, is that they just want work on themselves about who they are, how they feel, and not so much mull over what happened to them in their past. I concentrate on them, and how they feel and where they fit, who they are.

I work with grade 5 early in the year and grade 4 later in the year. They had to be a certain age to be mentally developed to a certain standard where they can work things out and reason. Grade 1, 2 and 3 can't do that.

Group session

Barry: The group session is one afternoon a week. All that group session is about for the boys, is getting them to realise they are normal because they will find out the other boys have the same issues and problems. That's a big one, because most boys don't think they are normal.

They learn how to talk, express themselves. We talk about feelings. That is done by asking questions but also role modeling. I often tell a story about my emotions and feelings and I am quite able to express that and so hopefully that helps them see that men can do that and are allowed to do that.

In the group session, Janet was the facilitator and I would sit there and pick up on all of the different behaviours. I would mirror some

In the group sessions they can learn about respectful relationships between men and women.

of the boys' behaviour, putting their legs up or their feet or whatever. So in that way we would work very well together. Janet would be aware of different things. She was the facilitator working on a structure of the session and where you are going and what you are doing. That allowed me the free time to just watch and observe and pick things up. When boys would say something I would say 'Excuse me can we stop there, what did you say?' And we would work on that.

Janet: Essentially I lead that group session. We do that so that they can learn about respectful relationships between them and women. I believe that you can't just change boys' behaviour simply by sticking men in schools, or having more men around. What you need to do, is to teach them about respectful relationships between men and women. Because there's always going to be more women in their lives on a day to day basis whilst they're at school. I can't see that changing in a long time so we needed to create an environment where they could learn how this man that they respect and admire, works with a woman who takes charge.

So the boys perceive that there is a woman in charge who still had a respectful relationship with Barry. It's very obvious when we're in the group sessions that I'm organising it. And then we're very conscious during that whole session about how we relate to each other. We show them that you can have a joke and you can hug each other and make fun of each other and all that sort of stuff. We don't act it out, that's just how we are anyway.

We don't know each other particularly well and we didn't before we started the program. It was about each of us being fairly comfortable with our own genders and what our roles were and then just this kind of synergy that happens between people. And in a working environment it's quite different to a personal one.

I don't think this would work as well if he and I were best friends, because then there would be a different dynamic. What we're trying to do, is reproduce social relationships between males and females. We want them to be like the relationships they might have at school between themselves and teachers, like relationships they might have between themselves and other men and women, not like the relationship found between their mother and their sisters and their aunts. It's not that sort of relationship.

Barry: In that group session, the male and female work very much together. Janet and I were very good at that, at working with each other. We could have reversed those roles, I guess but the powerful thing for many of these boys was seeing an adult male in this situation.

It was a very good working relationship and I loved it. I couldn't do it with another man, because we would both be the same and we would both be trying to do the same thing. But the beauty of the two of us working together was that neither of us had any more power. We were both equal and we were able to treat each other with respect. We were able to put our arms around each other's shoulders or hug or high fives or smiles or joke or laugh. There were never any arguments. There were never any dramas. A lot of these boys would not have seen an adult male and female getting on and doing things without any arguments or dramas. It was very much like a good fitting glove that the relationship between the two of us.

Janet: My role is to try and develop a relationship with those boys in a very short space of time. But Barry being there helps me do that. He becomes the catalyst. I'm sure the boys think that if Barry thinks I'm okay then I'm okay. So I don't have to get over that big hurdle you sometimes have to deal with being a female and getting across to these boys. They still develop a relationship with me and that's what I want to do. Not just because it's my job but because I think it's important.

Barry: What the boys are looking for is what I can offer to them as a male, it's the understanding part. There is such a huge relief when boys find someone that can actually understand them. But, I think the female involvement is very important because a lot of these guys have mums at home. They don't respect them and they have seen dads not respect their mothers. There needs to be a female and a male component in it. Boys need to see how to treat females. They need to see that females aren't just mothers who stay at home. In this group session with Janet and myself working together they see a female in a different way.

A lot of boys have issues like trying to fit in, wanting to be liked or get on with other children and they don't necessarily do that very well. They might behave in a not necessarily good way to achieve that acknowledgment or acceptance by other boys. When we do some work with them, they find out that it is okay to be themselves. They don't have to be anyone else. They are normal; they are good at things; they are valuable and they are worthwhile.

The boys start to taste that success and see what it's all about.

Changes in behaviour

Janet: The boys tell me about them being happier at home but I can't pin point if it's directly related to what we do. I think the whole program makes them feel better about themselves, gives them a better and clearer sense of their own identity. So that makes them happier and it goes on. They're happier, they're nicer to other people and other people are nicer to them.

So they report back to us that they're happier in class, they're happier at home and sometimes being happier isn't being happy, it's just a better hell than it was before, or they're managing the kind of thing they're dealing with. I don't think it's just that one session of Barry and I being in a room together. It's the way the whole thing is put together.

Working in the classroom

Barry: Part of what I do is work in the classroom with them. I don't work with the academic skills as in what they're learning, but how to learn. And I can help them get something finished, have some success there. They start to taste that success and see what it is all about. So they improve themselves in the classroom with their behaviour. They improve in the playground. There is a fairly big impact on the whole class, the girls in the class.

Mentoring other boys

Even though I had a structure when I came, it has changed slightly and it has evolved and I have learnt some things about what is necessary and what is not necessary. If I worked with them for a term, and lifted their self worth and value and then I walked away, they would just crack. So, the next level is mentoring, using those skills to help others. This gives them the sense of belonging to the school, being valuable in the school and they also form more relationships. They form a relationship with the teacher, as the teacher's helper and they also form relationships with students in that class. They are needed there, they are accepted, they are valued. They will continue to grow for the next two terms doing that same thing, with the same class, same children, same time. It's got to be consistent.

We have just had a group recently, five boys. If we had of written a script it wouldn't have come out so well. These guys decided themselves where they were going from here. They decided that they would mentor other students in the class. They said, 'We will behave and they will see that and they would copy us.' And the next boys go, 'Well we can do better than that. We can do it in the whole school, why don't we do it in the playground as well?' It's just amazing stuff. It really is.

You can be equal and have respect. That's probably the biggest thing the boys can learn.

Visually depicting the problem

About midway through the program there is an extra part of sitting down with them. I have had half the time of the program to work out these guys, and hopefully what the problem is. Then I can sit down and steer them through some stuff. We do a picture of the family and where they fit easily and where they don't; and then the school; and then a picture of themselves, and what is good about them and what's not so good. There is usually enough in the good but a million things wrong with them. So I try and help them through that. I encourage them to find for themselves that they are normal and okay. We search for what is driving, what is causing this particular problem they have got, whether it is attention seeking or perfection, or whatever. Then we can address that. The guys are just amazing, they can visually see it and they find their own way there with help. Bang - you have got them. And to them it is amazing - it is just a whole new world. All that information is in their head, they just can't get it all together. So they just need someone to help them do that.

Now all the boys are successful, but there are different levels of success, some are amazing, some are more subtle. The administration sees it, the teachers see it, the students themselves see it, parents see it. It's quite rewarding for me actually.

The program is very successful and works well because of all of the little bits and pieces. There is a woodwork part. If you took that out, it wouldn't work quite so well. If you took the group session out it wouldn't work so well.

Challenges of women and men working together

Janet: The real challenge was Barry not taking over. That's been the most difficult thing, just to let Barry know that, yes he gives value, but he doesn't need to take control or charge of it. He's a very easy going, easy to get on with man. He's still very male and he does it very nicely.

Barry: Men and women can have fun together, they can have a joke together. There are no cross words, there is no power struggle, and there is respect. Respect doesn't mean you have to be the underdog. You can be equal and have respect. That is probably the biggest thing the boys can learn. It would come across to the boys, that we both knew what we were doing, and we were both complementing each other. If one got into trouble or came to a halt somewhere in a particular subject, the other one would just jump in and take it over and then it would revert back. It was just easy and very smooth flowing.

Janet: The other challenge in my role has been that when I've been dealing with male principals. I'm not sure that they're really comfortable with having a man like Barry in the program, and they don't trust my judgement about him. You know I always read in their attitude, that he must be a paedophile or some such thing. So I have to spend a lot of time on public relations for the program and how Barry and I work together.

The kids love him, the parents think he's great, the school teachers like having an outside male that doesn't have an education background, who doesn't come around with any baggage about them. He brings in whatever he has and that is not threatening to them in their environment. He often will make more headway towards getting through to a teacher than I would because I'm from the Department and I'm a teacher. And even worse I'm an advisor.

The hardest thing was finding someone like Barry in the first place. Barry and I were thinking about how we could get more people like him involved in schools. The kids know when you genuinely like them. So we need men who genuinely like kids and value them for what they are. Probably if you went back to their school time, they were the naughty boys. And they've had life experiences that are now important to another boy. So each of the men I've spoken to who are good at this sort of work have had some sort of life experience with something that's brought them to a new place, a self- revelation like a marriage breakup or in Barry's case, he got Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. His whole life changed. And the women must take off their teacher hat. That's what Barry tells me to do.

Future Directions

Barry: The problems are in grades one, two and three these days. That's where it starts and there is not much help down there. I trialed a program last term. I went to a school and worked in grade two. It was a class with two grade twos butted together, two teachers, seven boys with real problems, two runaways. I spent a term there two days a week, as a behavioural management teacher. All I did was acknowledge the guys, form relationships, high fives, tap on the shoulder, 'Use my colouring pencils when you finish your work. I will help you, can I

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help you?' All that sort of stuff. There was just unbelievable changes in those two classes. I was able to help the females as well. You don't target children, you move around and you help, and you can see them. The girls get something out of it as well. Being a male and being a teacher aid in that room is very, very powerful.

I would like to train other men to be aware of these issues and how to not work on their academic stuff, work on the relationship side and the positive side of kids. I know it works. We need to get more males into schools. These guys need to be average. You need that sharing, caring understanding. What I have come up with is a training program hopefully for next year that will be cost effective and all schools can afford it, or afford it part time. But it allows more men to be able to get into it.

I believe men in those lower grades would be more advantageous and easily spread and more cost effective. I think that would ease a lot of the problems because as they grow older these boys might have learnt some social skills and learnt better relationship stuff and be a little bit happier about themselves before they get a little older and get more frustrated.

I would like more help. That is probably the biggest thing. The program is changing. I'd prefer it if Janet were still working with me. The program could do more work with teachers, getting them to examine their views and understand more about children. Teachers could change a lot of things in their own class themselves if they had more self growth and more understanding of the social and personal aspects of the kid's lives.

It takes me a little while to get a teacher to understand the social aspects. They say, 'Oh they will miss a class.' I say 'Forget that, please trust me, forget the academic skills, let's help the kids first, and then you will see a difference. Then the kid will want to learn. At the moment the kid doesn't want to learn.' Usually they come back and they are a hell of a lot better at their academic skills and they try a lot harder and they try to please the teacher.

I focus on the boys, which helps the girls, which helps the teachers. If I was to focus on teachers I would be doing that in a different way. If we had more team members, we could have someone working with the teachers. Someone focusing on the parents would also be good, because the boys change at school but they don't make any changes at home. The parents are still putting their children down without realising it and the family structure is the same.

Working with all of these children in the primary school. I am hoping that it will make a big difference to men in society. I think if it is done at school, you can capture most of the male students and you can make some changes there.

The most common thing I find is boys are just so lost, they are just lost in society. I know that is a big statement. I am not working with A grade students that come out of dual parent families that are well rounded and doing really well in society. I am not dealing with those kids, but I still believe that those boys have the same issues - they have an identity crisis - They are wondering 'Who am I? How do I fit? Do I belong? Am I valuable? Who values me?' For me this program should be for every boy in primary school, because there is a need for it. Unfortunately, we are only looking at the boys that are acting out, but there are a hell of a lot of boys.

Conclusion

This book has started a discussion on the role of women in boys' education. It has revealed the ways some women teachers are working successfully with boys. Women working with boys have particular challenges, as women, and bring particular gendered experiences to the work. These ways of working are valuable to boys. The women and men who contributed to this book are pioneers in a new field of endeavour. These women and men are striving to engage boys in the classroom. They are working to develop a love of learning as part of boys' identities; to support them to have successful cooperative relationships with each other and with girls and women; to help boys acknowledge and be proud of their differences and to learn from each other. They are linking the social and emotional needs of boys with their academic needs.

The book has also drawn attention to the need for women and men to work together. Women and men together can model the kinds of working relationships we want the boys to have. The teachers in this book were able to develop classroom strategies and programs and school cultures that include all the different boys and celebrate the variety of behaviours valued in boys. They endeavour to ensure that boys and girls are fully engaged in learning at schools.

Women doing boyswork are examining their own attitudes towards boys and men, stretching their own personal boundaries and having fun with boys in the classroom. They are communicating successfully with boys and developing mutually respectful relationships with them. They are tackling hard issues such as violence with boys and being clear and authoritative about what they expect from boys. Many women are joining with their male colleagues to do this important work with boys. This book is the first attempt to applaud their efforts in classrooms and schools around Australia.

The Men & Boys Program

The Program is based in the FAMILY ACTION CENTRE at the University of Newcastle, NSW. The Family Action Centre delivers support programs to marginalised and transient families using staff co-ordinators and trained volunteers. Action research, dissemination of information at all levels and advocacy are core features of the Centre's activities. Since the Men and Boys Program was set up in 1996 (initially as The Men's Health Project), men's and boys' well being has become a broad community concern reaching into areas of education, juvenile justice, cancer screening, fathering and suicide. The three strands which make up the Men and Boys Program are:

Boyswork – working with schools and with boys to improve health and education outcomes

Boys' behaviours and attitudes are increasingly being regarded as serious problems in our community. Boys low levels of literacy and poor academic achievement are being highlighted alongside traditional concerns with aggression and risk taking. A strategic development in all of these areas is to find ways of dealing with boys, individually and in-groups, which recognises the importance of male identity. To do this will require knowledge about boys and men. It will also require skill development. The seminars, resources, post graduate and training courses offered throughout Australia are an important aspect of the program's work.

The FatherCare Initiative – encouraging positive father involvement in communities

FatherCare promotes a positive social role for all adult males. FatherCare recognises that a new style of fathering is needed, one based on the needs of children for mutually respectful relationships with men. This initiative stresses men's social role in the community (through volunteering for example) as well as in the family. A major development in this work is the undertaking of a long term research project in ways to effectively engage fathers in early childhood services.

Improving Young Mens' Health – research and teaching for better health

Includes the full spectrum of health from illness and disease to physical, emotional and spiritual well being. Much of the research and health service delivery focused on men has been based on a narrow disease model of health. This approach, as seen by men's poor health outcomes, is now judged to be inadequate. A more social model, incorporating men's identity, is being developed for a range of issues from road traffic injury to depression and nutrition.

Activities undertaken by the Men and Boys Program include:

Conferences

Conferences under the titles Leadership in Boys Education and Working with Boys, Building Fine Men have drawn international perspectives and local experience together. Participants have come from across Australia and New Zealand.

Seminars

Since its inception in January 1996, the Men & Boys Program has provided seminars for education, health, welfare and social service to professionals in all states of Australia and New Zealand. Parent meetings and demonstration sessions with boys have been held in remote rural as well as inner city locations.

Post Graduate Course - Boys Education

The program offers a Post Graduate course through the Faculty of Education, The University of Newcastle. This skills -based course addresses classroom and whole-school based strategies to improve boys' education as well as a theoretical bases for boys' education.

Research

Research has been completed on men's health priorities, boy's needs, father's approaches to teaching driving, and men's behaviours in pharmacies. Research into boys' learning, schools responses to boys' needs and fathers' roles in schools is underway.

Publications

A range of practical classroom resources, including photograph sets, manuals, posters and books have been produced by the program. These resources are in use in schools throughout Australia and are in demand overseas.

Contact the Men and Boys Program on
Phone: 02 49 218739
Fax: 02 49 218686
Email: Deborah Hartman: dhartman@mail.newcastle.edu.au
Richard Fletcher: fmrf@cc.newcastle.edu.au
Men & Boys Program: men-and-boys@mail.newcastle.edu.au
Web: www.newcastle.edu.au/department/fac/boys

The majority of teachers of boys are women. Experienced women teachers talk about enjoying and using boys' energy in the classroom, tuning in to the ways that boys communicate, and varying lessons to suit all learning styles. Involving fathers and working with male colleagues are also covered. Teaching teams of women and men use the different interests and experiences of boys and girls to enhance the learning of both.

Boys in schools are not just learning subject matter. They are also processing important messages about being a learner, being male, and about relationships with each other and with girls. These case studies from schools around Australia show how women and men teachers are working together to assist them to become fine young men who do well in school and in life.

The Family Action Centre

The UNIVERSITY of NEWCASTLE